DECENNIUM ENDOWMENT LECTURES IN ENGLISH-I

THE RELATION OF TAMIL AND WESTERN LITERATURES

K. KAILASAPATHY

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Decennium Endowment Lectures in English - 1

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Publications Division
Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai – 625 021.

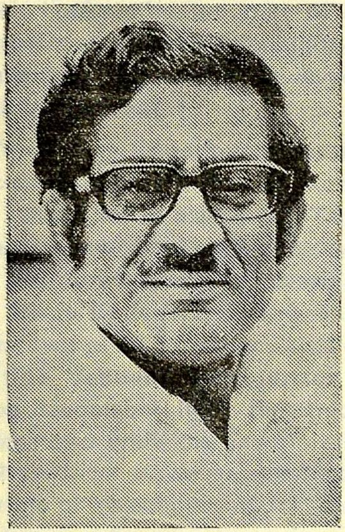
Publication No. 75

Rs. 6/-

Bibliographical information :

1.	Author	: Dr. K. Kailasapathy
2.	Title	: The Relation of Tamil and Western Literatures
3.	Imprint :	
	i) Place of Publication	: Publications Division Madurai Kamaraj University Madurai - 625 021.
	ii) Year of Publication	: 1984
	iii) Edition	: First Edition
	iv) No. of Copies	: 1200
	v) Size of the Book	: 1/8 Demy
4.	No. of Pages	: 70
5.	Subject	: Comparative Literature
6.	Printers	: Diocesan Lenox Press, Pasumalai, Madurai.

In memoriam



1933–1983

Introducing Kailasapathy

Kanakasapapathy Kailasapathy (1933—1983), Professor of Tamil at the Jaffna campus of Sri Lanka University and later its Vice-Chancellor, was known throughout the Tamil-speaking world as a versatile scholar in both Tamil and English. Essentially a sociological critic with a firm commitment to Marxism, he waged a relentless war against the linguistic parochialism and self-assertive emotionalism of Tamil scholarship and stressed the need for a dispassionate scientific study of writers and their books who are part of the continuity of literature and its commonwealth. He brought into modern Tamil criticism a rare theoretical objectivity, however inhibited it was by his ideological commitment.

Kailasapathy's writings range from a classic study of the life and letters of ancient Tamils (1966) to an exposition of Western literary theories (1978) for an exclusively Tamil readership, not to speak of his innumerable essays which he had been contributing to journals and other media of writing, right from his student days at Hindu College, Jaffna to his unexpected death in 1983. The 'first heir of his invention,' was a series of boyish effusions under title **Valluvar Vinchivittar** (Valluvar Excels) showing in a too favourable light the ethics of the author of **Tirukkural** in comparison with the moral reflections of some great savants of the world. However, this 'lisping' in criticism determined the nature of his scholarship for the rest of his life.

If we give credence to Kailasapathy's confessional prefatory utterances, a charming feature of many of his books, certain seminal influences were at work shaping his thinking as a literary critic : his early acquaintance with the classical scholar V.V.S. Iyer's **Kambaramayana — A Study** (1950), a pioneering comparative evaluation of Kamban not only with the source of his inspiration, Valmiki but also with Homer, Virgil and Milton; his ready acceptance of the Leninist claim of the foundations of scientific research laid by Marx in extending the tenets of dialectical materialism to the study of society in the form of historical materialism; the literary company he kept in Ceylon

and Tamil Nadu which deepened and widened his contact with Western literature; and, above all, his tutelage, first under Professor Kanapathi Pillai at Sri Lanka University as a student of Tamil literature and later under Professor George Thompson at the University of Birmingham as a research scholar, both of whom introduced him respectively to world literature and comparative literature.

Kailasapathy's works may be divided into three kinds, sociological, comparative, and purely theoretical, though they often overlap one another, particularly the first two which are actually complementary to each other. His repeated assertion of socio-economic determinism as a crucial factor in the genesis of literary works to the exclusion of less determinable circumstances like an author's psychological propensities and idiosyncratic options ushers him into the new domain of comparative literature as a 'proto-Marxist' who has equal faith in the scientific as well as the philosophic aspects of Marxism. As he has himself stated in his preface to **Samukaiyalum Ilakkiamum** (Sociology and Literature) published in 1979, his interest in the sociology of literature as an indispensable aspect of Marxism inevitably led to his involvement in comparative literary studies.

Though the comparative spirit is as old as **Tolkappiam** which in its codification of Tamil linguistic and literary practice invariably brings in references to Sanskritic tradition which must have made a debut into Tamil Nadu then, comparatism as manifested in the study of comparative literature as a discipline is new to India. Kailasapathy is the earliest of the Tamil scholars to expound its philosophy in his **Oppiyal Ilakkiam** (1968) or the science of comparative literature, the title itself decided by the positivism of the nineteenth century, particularly the deterministic theories of Hippolyte Taine and Marx. His exclusion of or more possibly his lack of acquaintance with the principles, praxis and standards of the new subject as developed by French, German and American scholars, may be

frowned upon by its practitioners. But his motive in recommending the adoption of the 'science' of the subject by Tamil scholarship as a necessary corrective to its irrepressible faith in the immaculate virtues of its literary heritage together with his scholarly attempt at exploring the potentialities of the comparative approach in drawing a parallel between the ancient Tamil belief in the 'heaven of the heroes' and the Norse Valhalla, in finding similarities between the topos of the Golden Age in Tamil and Hesiodic conception of it, in exposing the elitist nature of the Sankam society by equating it with the heroic age of the Greeks, and in stressing the significance of the revolutionary philosophy of the Siddhars by juxtaposing it with Taoism, frees him from the suspicion of presenting a distorted version of the study of comparative literature.

Many of the essays in the foregoing collection remind us of Kailasapathy's **magnum opus**, his English work, **Tamil Heroic Poetry** (1968), a controversial interpretation of the oral tradition behind the highly stylized Tamil Sankam poetry, inspired by the researches of H. M. Chadwick and Milman Parry on the Teutonic and Greek heroic poems.

Comparative literature is basically a study of literatures in terms of the concepts of influence and analogy, movement and trend, genre and form, theme and motif. It is also a study of literature in its association with its non-literary sources, which are sociological, psychological, ideological and so on. Like all good critics, Kailasapathy transcends his self-imposed theoretical restraints, as in his excellent thematic study of the story of Akalikai in its migration from Sanskrit to Tamil and how the chastity motif has been handled differently by different writers from the author of **Paripatal** to Sillaiyur Selvarasan. It is one of a collection of essays, **Atiyum Mutiyum** (1970) or 'Head and Foot', also the title of the first essay which questions with characteristic sarcasm and with the assumptions of traditional scholarship on the indefinable past of Tamil culture, followed by equally lively essays

which demonstrate that literary theories, forms and techniques are all products of social circumstances and therefore subject to critical verification. In such essays Kailasapathy plays the role of an intellectual gadfly, a role which did not endear him to the older generation of scholars to whom their literature was as sacred as their religion.

In his controversial but stimulating book on sociology and literature, the first and probably the only one of its kind in Tamil, in which not all the essays have a direct link with the subject, he finds fault with sociological thinkers from Comte to Weber for confining themselves to an analysis of the organization and divisions of society without paying attention to its economic problems. His preference is for Marxian criticism of society for its application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social problems. Hence, the only type of writer whom Kailasapathy will take seriously is the one who subscribes to Marxian dialectics and demonstrates his faith in it by dealing with the class war which in its revolutionary ideal would change or seek to change the very structure of society. It is this critical extremism which makes Kailasapathy cavil at much of Tamil fiction and recognize the value of only its recent realistic manifestations and the leftist writers of 'new poetry'. But this comment does not amount to a censure of essays like 'Lyrical Compositions and Individualistic Philosophy' and 'Literary Criticism and Sensibility' which are excellent examples of a much needed critical perception.

The two lectures on 'The Relation of Tamil and Western Literatures' surveying the last hundred years of Tamil literature which registered a paradoxical development of the rediscovery of the ancient Tamil classics in the middle of the nineteenth century leading to a reassertion of its cultural identity and at the same time responded to the Western impact on its fiction and poetry are a logical culmination of his life-long work as a comparatist. While the lectures echo and expand his already

considered views expressed in his essays and **Tamizh Novel Ilakkiyam** (1968), they repeatedly stress the Indian Tamil scholarship's continued neglect of the contribution of Ceylon Tamils from the time of the pioneer commentator, C. W. Thamotaram Pillai, a sad but true fact. The survey underscores a vital point that the impact of Western authors, more specifically English, on Tamil fiction, poetry, drama and criticism was belated. The reason may be found in the vice-like grip of traditionalism on writers until they were freed from it by their contact with the British-type of education introduced into the country in 1835. Kailasapathy's claim that the influence of English fiction on the rise of the Tamil novel is uneven and unproductive may be a critical exaggeration, as he has not taken into consideration the induction of native story-telling as by Vedanayakam Pillai, the mixture of fact and fiction, the philosophical and the mundane which is peculiar to the native genius and above all the 'creative misunderstanding' of borrowed materials. His bitter attack on the 'mystical' propensities of novelists from Rajam Iyer to K. S. Ramamurti, which is understandably biassed as coming from a Marxian critic, ignores the emergence of a new genre, the Vedantic novel, a national phenomenon, of which the best illustration is **The Serpent and the Rope** (1960). While his praise of the ascendancy of the psychological novel is justified, few novels show any clear evidence of the influence of Joyce, Proust and Virginia Woolf on the technical side. The impact of the Imagist movement on Tamil poetry is a much neglected subject, as Kailasapathy avers, and no critic has spelt out the transition from the 'prose-poetry' of Bharati to the much popular and equally maligned 'new poetry'.

Not only the failure of Tamil neo-classicism but also the emergence of nationalism in the continued struggle for political independence made poets like Bharati turn to the English Romantics for a sense of direction. Kailaspathy's brief but telling analysis of the impact of Shelley, Byron and Keats confirms my earlier finding on Bharati's indebtedness to them. In the case of

others like Addison and Rousseau, one should make a distinction between 'reception' and 'influence' and also list many examples of 'creative treason' in all the modern genres. That Shakespeare in translation "never kindled creative sparks" is questionable because Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar used his renderings of six plays of the dramatist to inaugurate a theatrical movement in Tamil Nadu.

The first endowment lectures in English were delivered by the doyen among Dravidian scholars and the first Vice-Chancellor of our university, T. P. Meenashisundaranar. But unfortunately, his extempore lectures on some common themes in the literatures of India, which were taped, could not be replayed for transcription, and his own efforts to recreate them were frustrated by his fatal illness. It was given to Kailasapathy to fulfil our objective to introduce modern Tamil literature to the world of scholarship from a comparative angle so that it would be an incentive for further research. I feel sad that his pioneering work on 'The Relation of Tamil and Western Literatures' has by the quirk of time turned out to be a posthumous publication.

Madurai-21 V. SACHITHANANDAN

THE RELATION OF TAMIL AND WESTERN LITERATURES

I

My grateful thanks are due to the Vice-Chancellor and the other authorities of the Madurai Kamaraj University for the honour they have done me by asking me to deliver these lectures. I have chosen "The Relation of Tamil and Western Literatures" as the theme of my lectures.

Very soon we shall begin celebrating the birth centenary of our greatest modern poet-Subramania Bharathi (1882 - 1921). A century is a brief moment in the life of a people whose cultural history goes back, at least, to two and a half millennia. Nevertheless, the last hundred years or so have a significance for exceeding the length of the period. This was a period when Tamil literature, was responding to external influences from the West, especially to English influences and at the same time trying to express its sense of nationality and the consciousness of its own tradition. It is a paradox that the period which saw intense western influences has also been the period of the 'National Resurgence'. For one of the first and chief things observable in the group of pioneers who heralded the Tamil 'Renaissance' in the middle of Nineteenth Century, both in Tamil Nadu and Ceylon, is that they were impelled to study their own history, and their own legends, their own customs and folk-lore. It is a strange phenomenon that the modern movement that began to mainfest itself during the latter half of the Nineteenth Century and gathered momentum by the turn of the century, should draw its initial sustenance from the past. In fact, it was in the process of discovering the past - a conscious intellectual endeavour, in contrast to the mechanical repetitions of traditional arrangements that characterized life during the previous few centuries—that the foundations for a new literature were laid. This phenomenon will be familar to

cultural historians as inevitable process in the passage of a literature from colonial rule to national independence and maturity. And the poetical works of Bharathi exeplify this apparent paradox. Accordingly the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the **Mahakavi** will be most apposite for a retrospective appraisal or evaluation of the relation of our literature to Western literatures. One recalls here Dr. V. Sachithanandan's admirable piece of work **The Impact of Western Thought on BHARATI.**

It will be evident enough, I hope, from the title of my lecture that I do not propose to go over the areas of Western impact on Tamil language and literature or to enumerate the results of such an impact. The story has been often told: the development of prose; the preparation of lexicons; the emergence of the modern movement; the rise of a critical awareness; these have been some of the direct consequences of the confluence of Tamil and Western literatures. To recapitulate them here would be to labour a truism. V. R. M. Chettiar's observation is typical :

> Modern Tamil Literature has had its growth and expansion both in style and range of subject matter through the influence of Western Literatures, in all its varied aspects of poetry, drama, fiction and literary criticism. [1]

The reason for my explanation is that the subject of my lectures is not simply the impact of the West on Tamil language and literature, but the nature of the relations between Tamil and Western literatures in the specific context of the growth of Modernism in Tamil. In another sense what I hope to discuss is the manner in which Tamil has responded to Western literary concepts and works and the over all significance of this relation between the two. I shall therefore not attempt a chronological account of the relation but rather a presentation of cultural history and criticism linking past and present.

It is common knowledge that dates are often arbitrary and a convenient date for reckoning the beginning of the relation between Tamil and Western or more specifically English literature can be anybody's prescription. One could choose any one of the following: 1812, the year The College of Fort. St. George was established in Madras; 1835, the year Macaulay minuted that all higher education in India should be conducted In English; 1854, the year The Department of Public Instruction came Into being; 1857 the year Universities were established in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras; 1879, the year the first Tamil novel was published; 1891, the year P. Sundaram Pillai (1855–1987) published **Manonmaniyam** a play in verse and professedly influenced by English models; 1896, the year, of publication of **A Professor's Holiday** being the speeches and writings of Professor P. Ranganada (1844—1893); or 1901, the year V. G. Suryanarayana Sastriar (1870—1903) better known as Paritimatkalaignar brought out **Tani-Pacura-Togai**, a book of Tamil Sonnets with English Echoes and Notes. The English versions of the Tamil Sonnets were rendered by G. U. Pope (1820—1907) of Balliol College, Oxford, who did yeoman service to Tamil language and literature by teaching them at Oxford and translating Tamil classical works into English. As has been aptly observed [2] the missionary Pope "contributed much to the elevation of Tamil studies and Tamil religion as legitimate subjects of study for oriental scholars". Every one of the events mentioned above shows the impact of English education on Tamils and signifies a turning point in their literary and cultural history.

Our first need, then is to select a date, preferably a decade, precise enough to be a watershed, yet flexible enough to include a variety of developments that could be considered seminal to the development of Modern Tamil literature. My predilection is for 1857, not because I have a bias towards university, but considering all its attendant consequences for many individuals and the society as a whole, the establishment of the University of Madras naturally enough compels our

consideration. Clearly we must appreciate the importance of the event in all its ramifications. To trace the consequences in detail would take us on a course that would be inappropriate here. It is enough to recognize the fact that the early products of the University were a band of outstanding men who were incredibly versatile in many fields. The fact is that at that stage, that is, the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, specialization had not set in so much that a man could combine the pursuit of science with other liberal pursuits. They were in some ways, like the Renaissance men. Let me cite a few examples: Poondi Ranganada Mudaliar was a professor of Mathematics, a brilliant chess player with profound interest in Philosophy and equally at home in the composition of Tamil traditional poetry. He was an able speaker and writer in English. V. P. Subramania Mudaliar (1857—1946) was a qualified veterinarian who pursued philosophy and psychology, translating some works of Herbert Spencer. He also translated the first half of Milton's **Paradise Lost** into Tamil. Undoutedly an ambitious task. He was also a poet with considrable originality as could be seen from his **Ahalikai Venba.** (Incidentally it may be noticed that the author had been influenced by Shakespeare's **Rape of Lucrece** in handling this theme) V. Kanagasabhai Pillai (1855—1906) who wrote the pioneering work **The Tamils Eighteen Hundred years ago** (1904) was considered a prodigy. He was actively interested in history, archaeology, philology and numismatics. His English translations of a few Tamil poetical works appeared in the **Indian Antiquary.** L. D. Swamikannu Pillai (1865—1925) was a polyglot in several languages. Likewise he was equally at home in mathematics, politics, history, astronomy, philosophy and literature. He wrote verses in English. He was well known for his amazing memory. His contribution to Indian Ephemeris is considered very high and original. P. Sundaram Pillai (1855—1897), although a product of Maharajah's College, Trivandrum, was of a similar mould. An outstanding Tamil scholar, he was a pathbreaker in chronological studies, pursued epigraphy, philosophy, psychology and science. He was

inclined towards mysticism, a fact clearly evident in his creative work. He himself makes mention of it in his Preface :

> ... It has not been thought necessary to exclude altogether such reflections, descriptions and minor incidents and details, as were found auxiliary to the moral and artistic effects of the play. To the spiritually inclined, some of the incidents may appear capable of allegorical interpretation and the stanza at the end of each act will perhaps be found helpful in the direction. ... It will be also observed that the metre used is the simplest in the language and the nearest approach to the English Blank verse, which not only saves the distortions and obscurities that rhyme often brings in its train but is also specially favourable to that continuity of thought and expression so needful in dialogues.

One could add more names to this list. Certainly C. W. Thamotaram Pillai (1832—1901), T. Chelvakesavaraya Mudaliar (1864—1921) and A. Madhaviah (1872—1925) need to be included. These men were graduates of the University that was established in 1857 and not only justified their higher studies, but were also men of extraordinary calibre; nearly all of them combined a scientific-historical outlook and a genuine respect for tradition. They were equally adept in versifying in Tamil and English and almost all of them wrote excellent prose in both languages. Even if it is taken as a purely arbitrary date, 1857 could be accepted as a legitimate landmark in our modern cultural history.

At this point I am impelled to make a few remarks on this preliminary topic from a Sri Lankan perspective. That there is a Sri Lankan perspective is often overlooked by scholars. I make these remarks not as reproach but simply as a reminder that in the making of the modern movement Sri Lankan scholars, especially of the last century have made distinct contribution. Someone remarked that an age is always too crowded for seeing in it the few things that are by definition unique. There was

something unique in the educational facilities available in Jaffna during the middle of the last century that have an important bearing on the relation between Tamil and Western scholarship.

This is not the place to discuss the process of modernization that took place and is taking place, in Tamil society and its ramifications in all aspects of social life. Suffice it to say that the intellectual awakening and fervour that were concurrent with this change were largely due to the impact of the West, which for all practical purposes was most prominent in the field of education and the resultant upheavals in social values. Due to a number of factors some of which were fortuitous and others intrinsically historical, Jaffna was in the forefront of this 'Renaissance'. The educational contributions of some of the Christian Missionaries in Jaffna to this efflorescence cannot be exaggerated. 3

By the 20s of the last century Jaffna had seen the establishment of Seminaries where systematic education was imparted at a very high level. As a result there arose a generation of Jaffna scholars who distinguished themselves in different walks of life and in many branches of Tamil studies. There was distinct esteem in Madras for Jaffna scholars and a person like C. W. Thamotaram Pillai was certainly reckoned to be an outstanding intellectual of his time. The very mention of such names as Henry Martyn (1811–1861), William Nevins Sithamparapillai (1820–1889), Carroll Visvanathapillai (1820–1880) J. Arnold Sathasivampillai (1820-1895), Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879), C. Wyman Kathiravelpillai (1829-1904), T. Chellappapillai (1837–1902), K. Senthinatha Aiyar (1848–1924), T. Kanagasundarampillai (1863–1924), A. Muthuthambipillai (1858–1917) will be sufficient to indicate the calibre of personalities who constituted the Jaffna school. Of course, almost all of them came from families with access to traditional learning. In a sense English education was super-imposed on their Tamil learning. But what proved to be of crucial importance was the quality of English education they were exposed to, at

Missionary institutions like the Batticotta Seminary and Jaffna Central School. For instance it may be noted in passing that C. Arumukam who was to become famous in later years as **Navalar**, 'orator' joined the Jaffna Central School in 1834 and spent fourteen years there both as a student and teacher. At the school he was deeply influenced by the Rev. Peter Percival who later became Professor of Indian Languages and Literature at Presidency College, Madras, and was also the founder-editor of **Dinavartamani** (1855) which was perhaps the first newspaper in Tamil.

Missionaries of the stature of Daniel Poor and Peter Percival, like Alexander Duff (1806-1878) in India, were not mere evangelists. They were of the strong conviction that "nothing short of a wide-spread system of elementary Christian education in the vernacular tongue, and a thoroughgoing system of scientific and theological instruction, both in Tamil and English, were the appropriate means to be used".

A perusal of the courses taught at the Batticotta Seminary would show very clearly their broad vision and aims. Besides Christianity, Science and Philosophy claimed a great share in the work of the institution. Consequently emphasis was laid on both pure and applied sciences: Mathematics, Philosophy, Natural History, Astronomy, Chemistry; as far as the Humanities and Social Sciences were concerned, besides English Literature, Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Sanskrit, Geography, Geology, History, Political Economy, and Book-keeping were taught. Although motivated by the zeal to preach and spread Christianity, there is no doubt that the education provided by the Seminary was remarkably liberal in character. Of course, subsequent changes in policy and orientation were to bring this enlightened experiment to an end. But during the early phase, under the principalships of Poor and Hoisington at the Batticotta Seminary and Percival at the Wesleyan School, Science and Philosophy held a dominant position in the curriculum. It was therefore not surprising that Sir Emerson Tennent, the sober and scholarly

Colonial Secretary of Ceylon made the following observations in his **Christianity in Ceylon** (1850).

> The course of education is so comprehensive as to extend over a period of eight years of study. With special regard to the future usefulness of its alumni in the conflict with the Brahmanical system, the curriculum embraces all the ordinary branches of historical and classical learning and all the higher deparments of mathematical and physical science combined with the most intimate familiarisation with the great principles and evidences of the Christian religion....The knowledge exhibited by the pupils was astonishing; and it is no exaggerated encomium to say that, in the course of instruction, and in the success of the system of communicating it, the collegiate institution of Batticotta is entitled to rank with many European Universities.

The Batticotta Seminary was started in 1824 and came to an end in 1855. For thirtyone years it had provided the Ceylonese in general and the Jaffna Tamils in particular, higher education that was unique at that time in India and Ceylon. Serampore College in Calcutta was, of course, established in 1818 and imparted higher Western learning at University grade. But its overall scope was some what narrower than that of the Batticotta Seminary, which at one stage taught even Western medicine. The Vellore mission hospital was established on the experience of the medical school in Jaffna pioneered by Dr. Samuel Fisk Green (1822–1884). An experiment was made to teach medicine in Tamil. The Universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were founded in 1857, two years after the closing of the Seminary. Under the circumstances it was no wonder that two of its products comfortably passed the first Bachelor of Arts degree examination of the University of Madras in 1857 without further preparation; C.W. Thamotarampillai and Carroll Visvanathapillai earned a place for themselves as the first graduates of the Madras University.

It was the scientific and philosophic education which Thamotarampillai and others received at the Seminary in Jaffna that enabled them to blaze new trails and carry out investigations covering a vast range of subjects. The liberal education they imbibed also kindled their spirits and people like Arnold Sathasivampillai and Thamotarampillai wrote original works in prose and verse. Sathasivampillai, for instance, published **Nannerik katha Sangrakam** in 1869 which has a special place in the history of modern Tamil prose literature in that it was probably the earliest attempt to write short stories in Tamil. He was also the first to publish in Tamil a history of Tamil poets **Pavalar Charithra Theepakam** (1881), **and Galaxy of Tamil Poets.** At a time when literary history was virtually unknown among Tamil scholars, Sathasivampillai produced a book that is even now most valuable. In his Preface to the first Edition the author said :

> Although we Tamils can boast of our Poetic Science and Poetic Literature, and affirm that few nations on earth can boast of as many poets as the Tamils, yet it is strange and humiliating that no attempt has ever been made, either in ancient or modern times to make a collection of the biographies of the numerous poets and poetesses that lived in southern India and Ceylon.

Likewise it was this sense of history and scientific spirit that launched C. W. Thamotarampillai on his pioneering attempt at periodization of the history of Tamil literature and into textual criticism in which he was a pathfinder. In both the periodization of literature and textual criticism he must have been influenced by Western methodology. One is temped to imagine Thamotarampillai engrossed in a variorum Shakespeare, with its lines of text at the top of the page, and multitude of surmises and conjectures at the bottom and contemplating on some classical Tamil text. Modern scholars are apt to wonder at the advanced theoretical and conceptual framework with which he carried out his critical work. I will go even further and say that not more than one or two persons after him have

improved on his rigourous methodology. It is interesting to compare one of Swaminatha Iyer's editions full of aids for students and explicatory material, with one of Thamotarampillai's containing a critical Preface, expiaining the method adopted in arriving at emendations.

The purpose of my digression was to delineate the background in which the relation between Tamil and Western literature was established. More than the specific and individual influences, the very exposure to Western liberal tradition and writings animated the first generation who strove to create Tamil works, often in the image of the literary works that moved them. In creating new forms and **genres** they openly expressed indebtedness to certain models and authors. What is important to observe is that although a few did attempt to write in English — like B. R. Rajam Iyer (1872—1898), A. Madhaviah, M. S. Purnalingam Pillai (1866—1947), and S. M. Natesa Sastriar (1859—1916) — most of the early writers chose to express themselves in Tamil. The best talents imbibed the literary spirit and manner from Western works and tried to "help the cause of Tamil Literature" by their creative efforts. Accordingly the use that is made of the Western exemplars, and not the fact of their having been influenced, is the useful test by which the better known Tamil works can be judged. The Australian critic Morris Miller has aptly stated: "Interactions between literatures are common features of literary growth, and in reacting to English influences we are not on that account to be depreciated". 4

Having discussed some aspects of the historical and educational background in which Western literature influenced Tamil, I would like to say something of the Tamil response to these influences. I have earlier referred to the particular circumstance — colonial rule — under which the relation between Tamil and Western literature was born. Comparative studies show us that a general pattern exists wherever European culture came to dominate through conquest and colonial rule some less

'advanced' society. The general progress consists of three stages : the first stage is the period of imitation of the models provided by the dominant culture; the second stage is characterized by intense and sometimes passionate debates between the forces attracted to indigenous sources and those drawn towards foreign models. During this state advocates of nationalism and regionalism will appear to be triumphant. The third stage witnesses the gradual weakening of self conscious nationalism and the emergence of more balanced views resulting in greater self confidence and un-self-consciousness. I do not aver that modern Tamil literature has traversed the whole gamut. We certainly have not experienced the third stage. We can comprehend it by reading about it but not feel it as actual experience.

At this stage I wish to raise a fundamental issue about the influences I have referred to earlier : the liberal education, and the resultant spirit of enquiry in the pursuit of knowledge, History and Science no doubt provided new preceptions and insights. And these were the benefits of English education. And yet it might appear that this change and progress was not exactly what we would expect them to be. It is true that the writers and scholars who benefitted by collegiate education were critical, cautious and liberal. They had adopted new approaches to literature — both creative and critical. If one were to compare Arumuka Navalar and Mahavidwan Meenakshisundarampillai (1815–1875) the distinctions will become clear. Arumuka Navalar had spent fourteen years in a Christian Institution, without being converted to Christianity, and yet became the greatest champion and reformer of Saivism. In religion he was orthodox, uncompromising and Agamic to the core. Undoubtedly he was a conservative. But he was also a great innovator in many matters. He was a pioneer in textual criticism, in the writing of text-books, in the creation of a unique prose style, in criticising malpractices in the management of temples and in attacking the impiety and illiteracy prevalent among many Brahmin priests. How does one judge him? On the

other hand consider Meenakshisundaram Pillai. He was perhaps the last great traditional versifier. He wrote nearly a hundred works. There is no evidence that he wrote anything in prose. He was the chief Tamil scholar at the Thiruvavadu-thurai Mutt. For all purposes he was oblivious of all societal issues and questions of literary innovation. He is of course remembered as the **guru** of Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942), Thiyagaraja Chettiar (1826–1888) and a few others. In fact Meenakshisundaram Pillai was the very antithesis of the modern Tamil scholar. This dichotomy has been vividly described by a recent western scholar.

> By the late 'seventies the native community seemed to be split between two jarring elements corresponding, on the one hand, to the pre-university leaders—ignorant, timid and superstitious—and, on the other, to the products of the universities. Each faction continuously appeared to thwart the other. 5

The point is that when we speak of Western influences we should not use it as a **cliche** or blanket term. The Western sources and models that influenced the Tamil writers did not repeat themselves in the works they inspired. The answer is not difficult to find. The two societies had not much in common. The apparent and very often surface similarities of the two literatures should not obscure the fact that the two atmospheres are not identical,. Many of the early Tamil writers acquired their literary taste on the basis of their reading in English be it for examinations, entertainment or edification. That being so, there was bound to be, and in a large measure there continues to be, a discrepancy between actual and literary experience. To the Tamil writers, not only the literary situation in their immediate environment, but more important, their social organization itself was considerably different. Naturally these were decisive constraints on the realization and execution of the influences. Thus when we speak of the historical and scientific spirit that permeated among the English educated Tamils during the latter

part of the last century, we should not conclude that the spirit was identical with what prevailed among their counterparts in the West. Compared to the moribund literary tradition that was lingering in the Monasteries and in the minds of some people, the attitude and approach of the new English educated scholars and writers were no doubt invigorating. The English educated writer did take a step forward, but he also retracted two steps backward. Inspite of his acquired rationality and the proddings of his inner thoughts he was willing to be conditioned by the climate of ideas and feelings and assumptions of his public and acquiesce in them. Let me illustrate my point. The author Poondi Ranganada to whom I have already referred to was a celebrity in his life time. He was awarded the title of Rao Bahadur by the Imperial Government and was a member of the National Indian Association and Cosmopolitan Club in Madras. He was a typical representative of the English educated elite hobnobbing with the rulers of the day. To me he allows himself too much acquiescence with surrounding superstition and bigotry. He made the following candid statement in a paper read at Madras in 1884.

> I may feel sincerely that the way in which religious ceremonies are performed and **mantrams** uttered by my family priest is a mockery of things solemn, a profanation of things sacred, and yet this solemn mockery, this sacred profanity must be endured, or I run the risk of being reviled as an apostate. I may feel that the best thing I can do for my stupid son is to keep him single, until such time at least as he is able to shift for himself and earns enough to maintain a wife and children with ; but such is the tyranny of custom that he must be married as soon as he arrives at man's estate even though I have to bear the burden of supporting, it may be to the last day of my life, my worthless son and his wife and all the creatures they may bring into existence. It may seem to me to be a profligate

> waste of money to spend hundreds and thousands of rupees in connection with a marriage on gifts to the well-to-do, food to the pampered, on dancers, and songstresses, on processions and illuminations and on the various shows and festivities that are imagined to be an integral part of marriage, but I must do as others do, or I shall be taunted as a miser, and suspected even by my friends as a possible renegade. [6]

We find here the split between the public and the private. There is a victorian hypocrisy behind this rationalization or self justification. It is a clear case of double standard. Bruce Tiebout McCully has succinctly described this state of affairs :

> The broad barrier that separated the public, outer life of the educated Hindu, that is, his life as an officer of the state or as a teacher or lawyer from his private inner life, resembled the double life of the somnambulist. [7]

It is a reflection of the split personality of the author that the major creative work he wrote in Tamil was **Kachchikkalambagam. Kalambagam** literally 'mixture combination' is a comprehensive hyper **genre** which admits great variety both in metre and themes. [8] In Tamil literary tradition it was considered a challenging and demanding **genre.** The maxim **"ellampadi kalambagam padu"**, meaning one should take it up having gained experience in handling other forms indicates how onerous it was. The fact that he wrote reasonably good prose befitting his time but chose to labour on a very traditional verse form shows that "he kept his verse and his prose in two different compartments". Ranganada Mudaliar's reaction was not an isolated instance. The next name I like to cite is of slightly later date and certainly better known. A. Madhaviah was another writer, at home both in English and in Tamil. I quote from his English novel **Thillai Govindan,** published under the guise of a posthumous autobiography. These are among the concluding passages:

> My quest was not to unravel the great mystery, or draw the veil from off the unknowble; I only wanted some principle to guide me in daily life a rudder to my barque which would not appear monstrous to my reason. And this I found in that most amazing and perpelxing book, the " Bhagavat Gita". ... Do thy duty, and do it with utter indifference to the fruits of action, preached the "Githa" in one place, and I felt that this alone could ensure peace of mind. Theosophical literature also formed aportion of my studies, and mostly through its means I was convinced, as far as conviction is possible in such a subject, of the truth of the doctrines of reincarnation and karma. So far I had become richer in faith, or perhaps duller in reason, and the result was not restlessness but peacefulness of mind.

In a work of fiction these words of the hero, Thillai Govindan, need not be ascribed to the other. And yet on circumstantial evidence and other clues they could very well reflect his mind. The temptation to quote from a review of the book is irresistible. The Englishman Frederic Harrison with whom George Eliot was on intimate terms and held in high regard by her [9], had this to say:

> He goes as a student to Madras, falls in with Christian Missionaries, repents and amends his life, becomes a disciple of Ingersoll and Bradlaugh of Beasant, Huxley and Tyndall. He takes up the study of law, but eventually becomes a Government inspector of police in a rural district. The inner life of a native official is a curious revelation. Still more is the story of his young wife's maladies, fancies, and the pilgirimages to the shrines, and the domestic and conscientious struggles of a practising Brahmin who was a Spencerian philosopher. He then becomes a political reformer and agitates for wholesale

> revision of native laws and customs. He becomes a delegate to the National Congress. His motto is, "India, with all thy faults I love thee still". He studies "Sartor Resartus", "Robert Elsmere", the Bible, Thomas A Kempis, theosophy and George Eliot. But he finally reverts to "reincarnation" and "Karma". He gives himself to meditate on the Vedas and adopts the practices of a Yogi. In that he finds peace and rest. It is a curious book—how far literal memoirs, how far invention we need not inquire. But it is a fascinating picture of the contrasts and confusions of Hindoo antiquity suddenly plunged into the whirl pool of modern Europe'.[10]

The sort of regression referred to by Harrison need not be taken on its face value. However the passage quoted shows a definite trait discernible in a number of Tamil novels: preoccupation with religion characertizes many of them. From Rajam Iyer's **Kamalambal Charithram** (1896) and K.N: Subramaniam's **Poytevu** (1946), to K. S. Ramamurthi's **Valithunai** (1980) mysticism, **Vedanta, Karma,** reincarnation and similar subjects have been the primary concern of many novelists. The question is not one of religion **per se,** but of its compatibility with the novel as a literary form. For, it will be remembered that not withstanding the prevalence of puritanism and the presence of religious concerns in the early English novels, they have no priority of status. We see in the history of English novel, the gradual emergence, and the gradual shaping and ripening of a secular viewpoint which was but a reflexion of the "new type of Englishman, empirical, self-reliant, energetic, and with the sense of a direct relation with a God made in his own ma ge." This naturally led to the emphasis on character itself which came to be considered the distinguishing mark of the novelist. Of course character was seen in the context of its gradual unfolding in its environment. And it is through

the interaction of man and his **milieu** that we get a glimose of the quality of his physical, social, emotional and intellectual experience. This trend in English literature began with Daniel Defoe and that is why he is often considered to be the first English novelist. Ian Watt's observation is pertinent :

> The jury does not normally allow divine intervention as an explanation of human actions. It is therefore likely that a measure or secularization was an indispensable condition for the rise of the new genre. The novel could only concentrate on personal relations. Once most writers and readers believed that individual human beings, and not collectivities such as the Church, or transcendent actors, such as the Persons of the Trinity, were alloted the supreme role on the earthly stage. 12

Here again the striking difference between the main trend of English and Tamil novel comes into bold relief. If, for instance, we analyse the novels of Rajam Iyer, Madhaviah, T. M. Ponnusami Pillai, Idaikkadar (T. Nagamuthu), K. N. Subramanian, Chidambara Subramanian and K. S. Ramamurthi, we at once perceive in them the basic assumption of the reality of the spirit. It is an **a priori** assumption. Whereas spirituality should be presented only through "the subjective experiences of the characters", many Tamil novelists betray something of the reverence accorded to the **Sruti**, the Vedic revelations, in their treatment of religious concepts. In other words the intrinsic merit of religious belief and its innate excellence are taken as articles of faith. But in the west the growth of the novel was surely facilitated by a world view centred on secularism and individualism. It is true that in a novel like **Valithunai**, an attempt is made to present the idea of religious self-scrutiny from the individualist and subjective plane, and also treat it within the naturalistic tradition. Nonetheless incidents implying Divine providence, retribution and fate seem to impinge on the consciousness of

the characters, and their actions appear to depend upon a transcendental scheme of things. To continue my argument, I would like to touch upon one more novelist - B. R. Rajam Iyer. Widely acclaimed as the first modern novelist, it has become a habit in recent years, of suggesting that the main tradition of the Tamil novel begins with him. A contemporary of Iyer, P. Sundaram Pillai himself no mean scholar, gave the work superlative praise. There is no gainsaying that **Kamalambal** is one of the best achievements in Tamil fiction. What is of interest to notice here is the vast difference between Rajam Iyer's work and the novels of George Eliot despite the assertion of some critics that the two authors are comparable and that Iyer was influenced by Eliot. (There is of course an observation by K. N. Subramanian that **Kamalambal** was consciously modelled on Goldsmith's **The Vicar of Wakefield**). Let us consider Rajam Iyer and George Eliot. Historically speaking it is easy to see that the novels of both the authors mark a definite change in the nature of the fiction in their respective languages. As is well known George Eliot was not primarily concerned with offering entertainment but to "explore a significant theme-a theme significant in its bearing on the serious problems and preoccupations of mature life"[13]. As Joan Bennet has remarked in her George Eliot : **Her Mind and Art**, unlike many of her contemporaries she never succumbed to the "wish to provide the sort of entertainment the reader demanded", nor was she moved by the "wish to propagate specific views". The same thing may be said of Rajam Iyer, although his wish to propagate **Vedanta** often protruded in his art. In the choice of village life as the substance of the novels, in the portrayal of the social structure in rural societies, in the strong preoccupation with moral issues, in their possession of descriptive powers and many other matters there are no doubt conspicuous similarities between the two. However the profound dissimilarities too cannot be overlooked. Foremost among the differences is their religious

faith. By the time she came to write her novels George Eliot's conversion to religious agnosticism was complete. Her close association with the Positivists, her translation of Strauss's **Leben Jesu,** her study of Spinoza's **Tractatus Theo - logico-Politicus and Ethics,** her acceptance of the findings of contemporary science, especially heredity, and other intellectual pursuits placed man in the centre of the universe. The study of Spinoza had helped her to free herself from the Procrustean bed of dogma. [14] As Ian Watt says, novelists like George Eliot have "inherited of Puritanism everything except its religious faith". For her ethical religious and social norms and conventions were products of history "evolved in time and changing with time". After her conversion to agnosticism and her release from dogmatic religious beliefs, "metaphisical speculations did not disturb her and she was content to devote her own attention to the world of all of us"[15]. In 1859, when Darwin's **Origin of Species** was published and much debate and controversy ensued, George Eliot accepted the theory with assent and understanding.

Now when we consider Rajam Iyer the differences are very striking. In religious matters he was the opposite of George Eliot. His life was very short - just 26 years. Although he was a lover of poetry and contemplated leading the life of an aesthetist he quickly outgrew that thought and began to pursue the Vedantic ideal of religious unity. As has been observed by G. S. K., the editor of **Rambles in Vedanta,** which contains the writings of Rajam Iyer, " Already, Mr. Rajam Iyer had apparently come under the influence of Vedanta philosophy of which the conclusions are largely adopted in his novel .... Now the Vedantin too works for happiness but works with the immediate object of realising an absolutely permanent happiness without causing the least injury to others. Now the Chief value and peculiarity of Mr. Rajam Iyer's life consist in that he so early felt and recognised the value of such happiness and of an ideal so purely transcendental and

impersonal, under conditions apparently out of the way of and hostile to such recognition and, succeeded in realising his own Self - the one without a second". Those two words, 'transcendental' and 'impersonal' describe his works. No doubt like most of Eliot's novels, Iyer's **Kamalambal** and his unfinished novel in English **A Dewan Bahadur and a C. I. E.,** offer a beautiful microcosm of Tamilian village life in the early years of the last century. There are passages of poetic intensity, particularly in **Kamalambal**. And yet the dominant note is one of mysticism. In the author's own words, the novel records "the innermost experience of a restless soul which struggled much, and after a long course of suffering, has at last found a fountain all undefiled and pure to slake its thirst of ages"[16]. It may not be an autobiographical novel, but Sreenivasan bears too close a resemblance to the author in as much as Maggie Tulliver bears a much closer relationship to George Eliot than any character in "**The Mill on the Floss**. What is pertinent here is the fact that the making of sublime spiritual experience central to the novel by Iyer, vitiates the emanation of modern consciousness of the characters in the context of a changing and developing society. This is a weakness that has crippled many Tamil novelists since Rajam Iyer's time, The 'commitment' to Vedanta rather than freeing the author, in actual fact restricts his vision of human life which in a deeper sense hampers his art. It is accepted axiom that character is conditioned by environment and its potential for growth and lack of it is limited by the world around it. In other words, the external world is very much with the novelist and only in its physical context does he present characters and through them his vision of life. As pointed out by Bannett "the difference in quality between George Eliot's novels is closely related to the degree of success with which she gives life to the social world surrounding her Central characters"[17]. This was something which Rajam Iyer, as a **Vedantin**, could not really comprehend and totally subscribe to. I shall allow him to speak for himself :

> The ideal society, according to Vedanta, **is not a millenion on earth,** nor a reign of angels, where there will be nothing but through equality of men, and peace, and joy - the Vedanta indulges in so such Chimeras – but one, where religious toleration neighbourly charity, and kindness even to animals from the leading features, where the fleeting concerns of life are subordinated to the eternal, **where man strives not to externalise but to internalise himself more and more** and the whole social organism moves, as it were, with a sure instinct towards God. This ideal will be steadily presented in these pages ... (italics author's)

This brings us back to the words 'transcendental' and 'impersonal'. On a close analysis we would find that George Eliot's emphasis is very different from Rajam Iyer's. While Iyer believed that man moves instinctively towards God, George Eliot took the position that through his "capacity for resolution and moral effort" man retains his free will. It is this basically contradictory worldviews that account for the qualitative differences in the works of the two writers. "The superficial and technical similarities between the novels such as the author intervening in the narrative and commenting upon his characters, of turning aside to lecture the reader, or even (in the case of George Eliot, in her earlier works) underlining the didactic element, should not lead us to draw dubious conclusions. The question of religious faith and attitude to God, let alone the social world they lived in, are of paramount importance in evaluating the nature of their work.

In commenting on Rajam Iyer and others after him, who have handled the spiritual theme, it must be pointed out that they have, consciously or unconsciously, been influenced by our epic tradition. The epic, as we all know, is a closed and established form with built-in conventions. In it there is no separation or contradiction between matter and spirit. But the

novel, as we have seen earlier, emerged in a **milieu** which saw secularization as the main intellectual trend. Writing on the historico-philosophical conditioning of the novel and its significance, Georg Lukacs observed :

> The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God.... The novel hero's psychology is the field of action of the demonic. Biological and sociological life has a profound tendency to remain within its own immanence; men want only to live, structures want to remain intact; and because of the remoteness, the absence of an effective God, the indolent self complacency of this quietly decaying life would be the only power in the world if men did not semetimes fall prey to the power of the demon and overreach themselves in ways that have nor reason and cannot be explained by reason, challenging all the psychological or sociological foundations of their existence. [18]

Fredric Jameson's comment on Lukac's observation is equally interesting.

> Each novel is a process in which the very possibility of narration must begin in a void, without any acquired momentum : its privileged subject matter will therefore be the search in a world in which neither goals or paths are established before hand. [19]

Let me return to my point of departure : I had said that inspite of a liberal education and a certain amount of close acquaintance with science and history - all through English education - our early novelists differed very much from the Western novelists of their time. What is remarkable is that most of the early Tamil novelists were sufficiently familiar with the works of George Eliot and others of her generation. They were also adequately aware of the philosophic and scientific theories of the leading English and to some extent of the European thinkers of the day. We know for certain that men

like P. Ranganada, V. P. Subramania Mudaliar and V. G. Surya-narayana Sastriar had a sort of 'direct' access to Herbert Spencer through David Duncan who came to Madras around 1868. Duncan had started working for Spencer about that time, editing his works for publication. Duncan was Professor of Logic and Philosophy in Presidency College, Madras, and people like Ranganada were his personal friends. Not only in Tamil Nadu but all over India, Spencer's immense influence on Indian intellectuals as well as on British Civil Servants has been testified to by S. K. Ratcliff. Charles H. Heimsath has in his **Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform** (1964) given copious references to the vogue Spencer enjoyed in 19th Century India and to his influence on contemporary Indian writing. Auguste Comte's (1798–1857) books too were part of the reading material of Indian intellectuals through Harriet Martineau's translations. **The Positive Philosophy** of Commte had become popular among the English educated. Yet one cannot help marvelling at the fact that how little the Positivist philosophy and scientific theories like Darwinism had **real** influence on the consciousness of most educated Indians. Their writings on these matters were not all of a piece. Heimsath's comment is illuminating :

> After the establishment of the University system in Madras there was a rapid spread of Western ideas through the ranks of the higher educated. ...The new ideas however, seemed to affect their thinking without changing to any great extent their religious observance and modes of social behaviour. When the social reform movement did get fully underway in Madras, in later decades, it stressed peripheral issues;...... social welfare work was always a more popular form of organized endeavour than social reform.[20]

This sociological fact has far reaching implications for the understanding of Tamil writings that were done seemingly

under Western influences. The Tamil elite were at best eclectic, drawing different things from different schools and systems.

An interesting passage occurs in **Prathapa Mudaliar,** the first work of prose fiction in Tamil. In the anecdote related by Devaraja Pillai about the brahmin Anandaiyyan who aped the Eurasians, Anglo-Indians and other denationalised groups, he is rebuked for reading atheistic author; the motley assortment reads like a list of proscribed authors : L. Lecky, Stephen, Bain, Darwin, Comte, Mill, Herbert Spencer, Huxley, Hume, Collins, Tyndall, Voltaire. It is said that as a result of reading these authors, Anandaiyyan had come to deny the existence of God, Good, Evil, heaven, hell and the scripture. He had become an Epicurean. The anecdote is designed to censure rationalist thought by overt criticism and innuendo. His immoral behaviour is plainly attributed to the corrupting effect of these irreligious tracts. The point is made explicit by Vedanayakam Pillai himself in the Preface.

> In writing this story, I have not followed the example of those novelists who depict human nature as it is, not as it ought to be, and who thus exhibit bad specimens of humanity which are often mistaken by the young and inexperienced for objects of imitation. I have represented the principal personages as perfectly virtuous in accordance with the opinion of the great English moralist Dr. Johnson.

We see here the lumping together of diverse personalities ranging from social thinkers, political philosophers, economists and natural scientists. Perhaps what was thought to be common to all of them was their acceptance of philosophical realism with its method of the study of the particulars of experience by individual investigators. Probably almost all of them would have held the scientific inquirer to be "free from the body of past assumptions and traditional beliefs". Students familiar with the philosophical systems of India will at once recognize

the striking resemblance between the treatment of the Charvaka school in the Hindu polemical writings and the portrayal of atheistic thinking in **Prathapa Mudaliar**. By painting the 'westernized' Anandaiyyan as despicable and degenerate and describing him as a slave of sensual pleasures who believes in 'eat' drink and be merry', Vedanayakam Pillai was falling back on Indian philosophical orthodoxy to buttress a christian critique of materialism. Needless to say neither standpoints are particularly conducive to an objective treatment of character and actuality. Ian Watt has put it laconically :

> The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects the individualist and innovating reorientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth; The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named. [21]

In this sense **Prathapa Mudaliar** would appear to have obvious shortcomings.

In the post-Enlightenment era and particularly during the age of industrialisation science became part and parcel of life. Laws of nature were paralleled by natural laws of social progress; this was the fundamental thinking of the Postitive philosophers. In other words, natural philosophy and social philosophy went hand in hand in Europe. There were, of course, many variations on this system but it was pervasive. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied the theory of Evolution to society. As has been described by Hofstadtr, "Spencer was the embodiment of Social Darwinism". He took the idea of the survival of the fittest and applied it to the social world. The Indian elite who devoured Spencer's philosophy took to his social thought very readily but discarded the scientific elements in it. The idea of progress naturally appealed to them. But they ignored the fact that the

Idea of Providence was incompatible with it. This anomalous separation of ideas affected their creative works adversely. Science is more than mere reasoning. As the pioneers of Scientific methodology Hume and Bacon and others emphasized reason alone does not constitute the scientific method. "Reason gains its power only when it is joined with observation, which is where the inductive or empirical method enters". It needs no special argument to say how vital observation and empirical method is to the serious novelist. I would like to close my comments on this point with a quotation from Engels' **Dialectics of Nature :**

> Natural scientists believe that they free themselves from philosophy by ignoring it or abusing it. They cannot, however, make any headway without thought, and for thought they need thought determinations. But they take these categories unreflectingly from the common consciousness of so called educated persons, which is dominated by the relics of long obsolete philosophies, or from the little bit of philosophy compulsorily listened to at the University (which is not only fragmentary, but also a medley of views of people belonging to the most varied and usually the worst schools), or from uncritical and unsystematic reading of philosophical writings of all kinds. Hence they are no less in bondage to philosophy. [22]

While analysing and assessing the type of influence exerted on Tamil literature by Western thoughts it will be worthwhile to ponder upon Engels' perceptive pronouncement.

Speaking of Tamil fiction it may be pointed out that notwithstanding a fairly continuous and consistent connection with English literature, the influence of English fiction has been uneven and generally speaking unproductive. The early novelists Vedanayakam Pillai, Rajam Iyer, Madhaviah, Natesa Sastriar and Ponnusamy Pilllai had finished their major works by the first decade of this century. Their staple of English

reading comprised the Victorian novelists and their predecessors. They were not exposed to European fiction which began to appear in English translations in the second half of the century. The Russian and French fiction became influential in England and as Walter Allen aptly phrased it, " the result so far as England was concerned, was the mutation of which the modern English novel was the product." [23]

The early Tamil fiction writers had, if they chose to read, English novels from Defoe (1660—1731) to Meredith (1828—1909), by the Eighteen-eighties the era of the later Victorians had come to an end. It is a fact to ponder that no major English influence, however weak and ineffective, is to be detected in Tamil fiction after the first world war. During the twenties and thirties of this century the main motto of our fiction writers appeared to be, 'make' em laugh, 'em cry, make' 'em wait'. The tradition of Rajam Iyer was revived in the late forties and fifties by novelists like K. N. Subramanian and Chidambara Subramaniam (1912—1977) both of whom were avowed Vedantins. In the works of the latter writers one can hear echoes of European novelists. But on the whole Western influences by way of particular authors of books seem to have come to an end. An isolated instance of Gorky's impact on Ragunathan in his **Panchum Paciyum** (1953) does not constitute a definable influence.

What is more tangible and palpable is the growing ascendancy of the psychological novel in contemporary Tamil which ultimately must be traced to Western influences. Looking back, it must be said that K. N. Subramaniam's **Oru nal** (1950), **albeit** consciously modelled on Joycean technique heralded the advent of the psychological novel. Sundara Ramasamy, R. Chudamani, Neela-Padmanabhan, T. Janakiraman, L. S. Ramamirtham and a few others have dealt with the inner life of characters making, thereby, private experiences the sum and substance of their novels. Whether the influences have come directly from the propounders of psychological theories or through Virginia Woolf (1882—1941), James Joyce (1882—1941)

and their like is a matter for further study. Someone remarked that there are at least seven schools of psychology battling for recognition and dominance in the field. I do not know how many schools have reached our writers. But reading Jeyakanthan, Indira Parthasarathy and Janakiraman and a few others one can be certain that Freudian school has come to stay.

But one passing comment may be in place. Whether it be fiction, poetry. drama or criticism it looks as though the impact is felt after atleast three or four decades. We have been several years behind the times. This tradition was established by the early novelists discussed a while ago and maintained by our so called **avantgarde.** Joyce, Proust and Virginia Woolf belong to the decade of the first world war. Tamil writers began to evince interest in them only in the late fifties and sixties. It is true that Puthumaipithan (1906—1948), K. N. Subramanian and C. S. Chellappah have made passing remarks about 'interior monologue' and 'stream of consciousness' in their works, somewhat earlier [24]. However the significance of the psychological novels and an interest in their creators manifested as a phenomenon amidst us almost fifty years behind the times. Even then except for a few journalistic essays of an introductory nature, there is not a single study on this subject. The same thing may be said of the Imagist movement, which crystallized around 1910 in England but had a longer history in France. The revolt against conventional metres and diction was the essential feature of this movement. It was only in the sixties that the tenets of the Imagists were invoked by our 'new poets' and critics. The literary magazine **Eluthu**, played a key role in this. And again, if we consider the cult of aestheticism, of Art for Arts sake, associated in the minds of many with Oscare Wilde (1856-1900) and in some ways with the Bloomsbury group in London, and the literary coterie centred around T. K. C. in Tamilnadu, "the thought that good and pleasant states of feeling were the only things in life that were ultimately valuable, and these states of feeling arose primarily from the enjoyment of love of friendship or the admiration of beauty, in art, in nature, or in human

beings" seem to have motivated both the groups. Even so T. K. C and his associates did not proclaim the credo of art for art's sake; they were too cultured to do that. It is only since the sixties that the cry had assumed a virulent form. These instances would indicate felt there is a time lag in Western influences being felt in Tamil and even when they do so they are often metamorphozed into something very different from the originals.

NOTES

1. V. R. M. Chettiar, **Critical Essays,** Karaikudi, 1955. P. 32.
2. Eugene F. Irschick, **Politics and Social Conflict in India,** California, 1969. p. 279. Pope, along with Caldwell contributed in no small measure to what is called the "oriental Renaissance" in Europe. These men helped open the minds of many European scholars and researchers of "entirely new influences blowing from the Orient". see, Amaury De Riencourt, **The Soul of India,** London, 1961, p 258.
3. On some aspects of Christian missionary activities in Jaffna, see, K. Kailasapathy, "Arumuka Navalar : the Central Years (1834—1848)", **The Central,** Jaffna, 1979; K. Kailasapathy, "Arnold Sathasivampillai and the Tamil Renaissance" **Jaffna College Miscellany** (Centenary Publication), Jaffna, 1981. pp. 81-87.
4. E. Morris Miller, "The Relation of English and Australian Literatures", in **20th Century Australian Literary Criticism,** ed. Clement Semmler, Melbourne, 1967. p. 13.
5. Bruce Tiebout McCully, **English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism,** New York, 1940. p. 221.
6. **A Professor's Holiday** (2nd edn.) Madras, 1896. p. 73.
7. McCully op., cit., p. 220

8. See, K. Kailasapathy, **Thamil Naval Illakkiyam,** (2nd edn,) Madras, 1977. p. 31.

9. On George Eliot's association with Harrison, see, Joan Bennett, **George Eliot – Her Mind and Her Art.** Paper-edn. Cambridge, 1962. p. 26.

10. **Thillai Govindan,** London 1916. Introduction. Harrison's passages are quoted from the **Positivist Review,** 1908.

11. Walter Allen, **The English Novel,** (Pelican Book) London, 1959. p. 38.

12. Ian Watt, **The Rise of the Novel,** (Penguin Books) London, 1963, p. 87.

13. see, F. R. Leavis, **The Great Tradition,** London, 1948. p. 7.

14. Joan Bennett, op. cit., p. 42.

15. Ibid., p. 72.

16. **Rambles in Vedanta,** (reprint) Delhi, 1974. p. 72.

17. Ibid, p. 82.

18. George Lukacs, **The Theory of the Novel,** Cambridge Massachusetts, 1971, pp. 88-90.

19. Fredric Jameson, **Marxism and Form,** New Jersey, 1971 p. 172.

20. **Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform,** New Jersey 1964, p. 112.

21. Ibid., p. 13.

22. **Dialectics of Nature,** Moscow, 1954, pp. 278-279.

23. Ibid., p. 219.

24. Puthumaipithan's short story entitled "**Kayittaravu**" is a clear example of a piece of writing in the Joycean mould written in the early forties.

THE RELATION OF TAMIL AND WESTERN LITERATURES

II

In dealing with the relation of Tamil Literature and Western Literatures, I shall now consider the Romantic movement, which probably, has been the most important influence to come from the West. My overall approach is both theoretical and documentary. I shall not try in this lecture to cover all the ground. The main features of the influence and the manner in which the Romantic elements inspired many Tamil writers to reach out for artistic fulfilment will be indicated. The various parts of the general movement will be delineated and traced to their sources of inspiration. The remarkable endurance of the Romantic elements in Tamil culture, often unrecognised and unquestioned but nonetheless germane to much of the literary effusion, is in itself proof of the relevance of these elements to our modern movement. Ever so often, there occur in the arts certain major eruptions which seem to affect all their products and radically change their temper. European Romanticism is a convenient illustration.

The origin of the word Romantic is too well known to need restatement. However, since there is no indigenous Tamil word synonymous with it, and as I have just said, the impact of Romanticism has resulted in the marking off much of modern Tamil literature from the literature of the previous period, a general explanation of the original meaning of the word and its semantic extensions will be useful. It is interesting to contemplate on the fact that while appropriate terms have been coined in our language for classicism, realism, Naturalism and such other technical expressions, a satisfactory and acceptable word, coextensive in sense for Romanticism is yet to be found. I am sure the implications of this merit some thought. But I should

not tarry too much at this point. And I do not wish to give the impression that in saying this I know the reasons. Perhaps one difficulty is that Romanticism means not one but many things. That will, I hope, become clear in the course of my talk.

Now, the word "romantic", it need hardly be stated here, is derived from romance. And romance as most of us know is a type of medieval tale that originated in the languages descended from Latin in those lands that had been provinces of Rome. These languages were collectively called romance languages. The romantic tales were mostly tales of chivalry–dealing with love and adventure - and consequently came to be associated with these two things. Written usually in verse with scenes and incidents remote from ordinary life and interspersed with the improbable, or fairly–tale element the romance was highly dramatic. From this came the expression "romantic", meaning originally love, adventure, scenic beauty, improbability and make-believe. The romances were popular in Europe in the 15th and 16th Centuries. But Romanticism as a movement flourished in Europe in the Nineteenth Century although its beginnings were in the last quarter of the preceding century. As often happens different people prefer different dates. Ernst Fischer for instance argues that Romanticism was the dominant attitude of European Art and literature from Rousseau's **Discourses** until **The Communist Manifesto** of Marx and Engels.[1] From Europe the movement spread to America. As a result it was a European and American movement broadly pervading through the literary and artistic effort of more than a century - if we take into account its prelude and the aftermath of the main achievements. Being a pan–continental and trans-continental movement its efflorescence varied from country to country both in time and degree. But everywhere it manifested a strong reaction to existing cultural and artistic norms and values. Generally speaking Romanticism as a European phenomenon lasted from about 1780 and 1850. By Mid Nineteenth century the major figures associated with the movement were dead: Byron,

Shelley, Blake, Keats, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Pushkin, Lermontov, Goya, Buchner, Chateaubriand, Beethovan, Chopin, Schubert, Bellini, Balzac, Stendhal, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist. Novalis and Wackenroder.[2]

What is to be borne in mind is that hardly any creative endeavour was left untouched by these Romantics : literature, painting, sculpture and music of course benefitted most. As has been pointed out by Jacques Barzun, all the forms, ideas perceptions, tendencies, genres and critical principles had been put forward which the rest of the nineteenth century was to make use of in its further development.[3] In terms of their attitudes and actions the following may be recapitulated : in poetry the Romantics chose to admit all words in contrast to what may be called a specialized poetical diction, By 'all words' was meant the 'language such as men do use'; in mythology a departure was made from the sole reliance on the Classical that is Graeco-Roman to Celtic and Germanic; in drama they reacted to the strict adherence to the classical "rules" of the unities and exercised great freedom in handling observable diversities; (It is to the lasting credit of the Romantic generation that it admired Shakespeare and extolled his artistic greatness); in painting they rejected the prescription of the Academy which restricted them to antique subjects and took in a new range of subjects and new artistic methods; in music defying the rules prohibiting "the use of certain chords, tonalities, and modulations" they exploited the sound of instrumants in order to achieve musical effects; (the secularization of sacred music was to a large extent accomplished by Romantics) ; In their attitude to the past, they repudiated the prevalent assumption that nothing worthy has taken place after the fall of the Roman Civilization; they rediscovered the Middle Ages and drew sustenance from them. The Novels of Walter Scott (1771–1832) particularly the historical novels, which, he practically invented exemplify this aspect of the Romantics' interest. In fact one of the salient aspects of the Romantic Movement was its serious concern with

history. The reverence for the past shown by some of the Romantics is really remarkable. In their response to cities and urban centres the Romantics shared certain common features. They travelled to far off lands and continents and gave a new dimension and literary respectability to the word "exotic"; (It is a well known fact that German Romantics like Schelling, Schleiermacher, Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Schlegel and others responded to the discovery of Indian Culture with cries of ecstasy); their inclusiveness in accommodating folk arts that were despised by the earlier period gave an impetus to the flowering of new art forms enriched by the influx of folk literature and folk music. When we come to religion and politics too the Romantics were unorthodox in many ways. Not all of them were conformists and some of them were non-believers.

While these were the chief characteristics and positive contributions of the Romantic movement it must also be remembered that it was at the same time basically the result of a conscious revolt against the rigid but important conventions and rules of Neo-classicism. This deliberate revolt against dead habit and decadent tradition gave the Romantics a sense of struggle or as Goethe put it, a feeling of strife meaning resistance, opposition and eventual success or failure. Although many Romantics suffered from a deep feeling of melancholy and were often pessimistic, there were others who were imbued with voluntarism, which was a characteristic feature of romantic art Byron's poetry reverberates with it.

I spoke before of the English educated Tamils and their arrival at the literary scene during the middle of the last century. Here dates are relevant. Throughout the 19th Century educational horizons were widening.

Beginning from the days of Macaulay's reforms in 1835 all higher education in India had been conducted in English. The aim of the British rulers was to bring up a class of men who

would be "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect". For this purpose and as a result of a conscious policy of discouraging too much of "scientific" education for the natives, a classical type of curriculum was encouraged by the Britishers. "Right away, this new educational system was weighted down by an almost exclusive emphasis on literary pursuits, as distinct from scientific and technical instruction".[4] Everything was well set for the Europeanization of India's elite. In 1854 every province had been the creation of a Department of public Instruction which tried to help schools run on Western models. Thus in the 1850s the study of the English language and its great literature by the Tamil elite became a matter of course. And through the English language contact was established with the literatures of Europe. It is true that although the Tamil elite felt attracted to the English language and studied with avidity, they never became anglicized to the extent that some Bengalis were swept off their feet. But there was sufficient necessity to study English since it was coming to the forefront under the British administration.

So when the study of English was taken up earnestly by Tamils who like all others under British rule, thought it held the key to the power and prestige of the British people in India, it was mainly the literature of the Romantic period that was immediately available to them. Of course the literature of the previous ages were no doubt there, and were eagerly studied, but the past itself was rediscovered and selected and presented by the Romantics. What Buddha Deva Bose (1908—1974) says in connection with Bengali literature may **mutantis mutandis** be said of the Tamil context :

> This predisposition, as we might call it, was nowhere more manifest than in literature : it was the literature of Europe, rather than its physical or social

> sciences which, for the Bengali mind, had extra ordinary, elixir-like qualities. Indeed, the elixir was at first used as an intoxicant, for it was really Shelley and Shakespeare that our ancestor got drunk on, sherry and champagne being merely pretexts Shakespeare, Shelley and Blake, the literature of the English tongue, this from the beginning, is what England has meant to certain sections of Bengalis, and in the politically disanglicized future, will mean to increasingly larger numbers. This has been an inspiration in the literal sense : our literature was in-spirited and renascent.[5]

While the new educational system generated a strong inclination towards English certain other things were also happening, the most important of which was the discovery of ancient Tamil grammatical and literary works. The **Sangam** Corpus, **Tolkappiyam** and most of the post-**Sangam** works in particular were almost lost to the Tamil literary world by the Eighteenth Century which was on the whole a period of darkness and desolation for the Tamils.[6] In this situation of degeneration and paralysis the discovery of the ancient texts came forth as a light of ray and hope. And as I said earlier, the modern movement was paradoxically enough partially fecundated by the springs of the ancient past.

In many ways one can see an analogy between the European Renaissance and the Tamil awakening. It will be recalled that the influx of fugitive scholars from the Eastern Roman Empire bringing valuable manuscripts with them, contributed to the discovery of Latin writers like Catallus, Lucretius and the main body of Greek literature which led to a revival of classical studies and humanistic pursuits. Of course there were also other important factors that stimulated and assisted the Renaissance. But the inpact of the rediscovered writings of classical antiquity and the revival

of learning cannot be undervalued. They determined to a large measure the forms in which the Renaissance manifested itself. For instance the structural rigidity of the classical tragedy in Europe resulted from the influences of the early plays.

The discovery of these ancient texts gave a sense of satisfaction and pride to the small group of those Tamil intellectuals who were taught by the English academics and missionaries that the Indians had no classical literatures of antiquity. The rediscovery of these poetical and grammatical works was the sudden revelation of the past glory and greatness of the Tamils. When the reputed English historian James Mill (1775-1836) wrote **History of British India** (1818) virtually nothing was known of the period before the Muslim conquest. In fact Robert Caldwell (1814-1891) wrote **A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages** (1856) a seminal work that has had such an abiding influence over subsequent generations of Tamil Scholars., without knowing the existence of the **Sangam** Corpus and **Tolkappiyam**. For it was only in 1868 and 1883 that C. W. Thamotarampillai published the critrcal editions of **Collathikaram** and **Porulathikaram** respectively.

The complete edition of **Tolkappiyam** was published by him in 1885. In 1887 he brought out the first critical edition of **Kalitokai**, one of the Eight Anthologies of **Sangam** poems. It was only in 1889 that U. V. Swaminatha Iyer's edition of **Pathupattu** saw the light of the day and five years later **Purananuru** was published. To put it briefly the bulk of the **Sangam** texts, Tolkappiyam and the post-**Sangam** texts with their medieval commentaries were published between 1890-1925.

The rediscovery of Tolkappiyam and the **Sangam** poems gave a fillip to the notion of classicism among the Tamil scholars who at once equated it with the classicism of which their English mentors took such pride. As much as the Renaissance

and post-Renaissance writers and artists in Europe fell under the spell of the works and norms of classical antiquity, the Tamil Scholars too, thought it fit to be governed by the prescriptions of the earliest works. In the minds of many Tamil scholars a sort of parity had been established between European and Tamil classicism.

It has been observed in the European context that Classicism was a movement aiming at uniformity. It was also elitist in attitude, Tolkappiyar's aphorism **ulakam enpatu uyarntor metre,**'the term world denotes the noble ones' must have satisfied the ego of several English educated Tamil scholars who were privileged to have had that education and the attendant benefits. In imitating the early authors and adhering to the ancient grammars the neo-Classisists of our recent past were seeking a stability within known limits. Given their social status they preferred certainty and stability in literary endeavour which gave them scope, high honours and satisfaction. That is one reason why many of the neo-Classicists had a penchant for poetry than prose. Prose was still in the making and had no classical models to go by. Steeped as they were in a convention of bookish culture, they chose the meters for the several genres on the basis of similarity with ancient usage. Likewise their subjects too were generally didactic in character. They emphasized the efficacy of the rules or to put it in another way insisted on the priority of rules over meaning. Let us consider a few illustrations : S. Somasundara Bharathi (1879—1959) was a childhood friend of Subramania Bharathi, who took up to law and had a lucrative practice. Like many others of that era - K. N. Sivarajah Pillai, K. Subramania Pillai, S. Vaiyapuri Pillai - he turned to Tamil Studies and at one time, occupied the Chair of Tamil at Annamalai University. It goes without saying that he was one of the English educated elite. Of the Tamil poems he wrote **Mari Vayil** and **Mangala kurichi pongal nigalchi** have been praised by traditional scholars as exemplary pieces. In the preface the author has said that the poem has been

executed in accordance with the rules laid down by **Tolkappiyam**. The metre chosen is **thalicai kccakam** and the theme falls under the broad category of akathinai, 'love', To a modern reader, the poem along with the commentary like explanation, could easily pass off as an early poem. Except for its virtuousity there is virtually nothing in it to commend itself to a modern reader. (In passing it may be noted that Somasundara Bharathi's prose was equally pedantic, flat, uninspiring and a pale echo of the scholastic commentarators of the late medieval period). V. G. Suriyanaraya Sastriar wrote essays, plays, novels and poetry. A favourite pupil of Dr. Miller at the Christian College he had studied English, Philosophy and Tamil. Most of his Tamil poems were in traditional metres - **Kalivenba, aciriyappa, kaliviruttam, aciriya viruttam** and the like. It is small wonder that N. Balarama Iyer, one of the poet's disciples brought out an annotated edition subsequently. The poems were in need of glass and commentary if they were to be used by modern readers. Sastriar wrote these 'chaste' poems on various occasions. One was an Elegy on the death of Lord Tennyson (1892) and another elegy on the death of Queen Victoria. The instances could be multiplied, but hardly necessary. However I would like to quote the words of another neo-Classicist - M. S. Purnalingam Pillai- himself a teacher of English and the author of **Tamil literature** (1929) the first history of Tamil literature in English. The passage is taken from his Introduction to Sastriar's **Rupavathi** (1895) which could as well be the literary credo of the neo-Classicist. After complimenting Sundarampillai's **Manonmaniyam** as " eminently classical as it is in direction, metre and matter " he goes on to comment on **Rupavathi**.

> As a drama, what **Manonmaniyam** is in verse, **Rupavathi** is in prose, Though it is not praise to say that both are free from the Pigeon-Tamil which obtains so much even among the scholars of Southern India, who however imbued with western knowledge and stirred up by western example from their wonted

> lethargy to a sense of national literature, only pander to the tastes of the low and the vulgar, the choice and chaste diction of these two dramas our new-fledged writers would do well to consult, if they would provide for their earnest readers opportunities of knowing what the classical Tamil is, and what great purposes it can be made to serve. Our Sastriar has in **Rupavathi** pressed into his service, wherever necessary, the felicities of Tamil diction, pure and unmixed and given the reading public not only an intellectual feast but so vivid a portraiture of the ways and manners of princes and people of the age the literary witenagemont in Madura that their imagination cannot but be quickened, exalted, and ennobled.

Certainly Purnalingam Pillai has set the neo-Classical doctrine in the best light. That scholars like Suriyanarayana Sastriar were grappling with the concept of classicism can be seen in other instances too. In an essay entitled **uyartanic cemmoli,** 'classical Language', we see Sastriar arguing eloquently that if Sanskrit can be considered a classical language, then Tamil should equally be considered one. He puts forward arguments against the classification of Tamil as a Vernacular Language by the Universities commission. Perhaps Sastriar was the first Tamil scholar to translate the word 'classical' into Tamil. It was under these circumstances that the European Romantic movement began to attract the minds of many Tamil writers. They gravitated towards Romantic faith as a result of the failure of neo-Classicism to satisfy their felt needs. But more important was the immense upheavals' that were taking place in the society and consequently in the minds of men. The longing for freedom - both physical and psychological - was tormenting many sensitive persons. As the Romantic Shelley himself said of his time, many were moved by "a passionate desire to transform the world." Boris Suchkov has described the seence of the artistic leap from Classicism to Romanticism.

> Romanticism was extremely sensitive to the mobility and pulse of history and, breaking with the cannons of Classicism, the static form of Classical works, and with the objective form of realist works, it made subjective freedom of expression its manner, regarding only the free soaring fantasy of the writer, not subject to any laws or prescriptions as being capable of presenting the dynamics of life. Indeed, the works of romanticists reveal a free treatment of composition, liberties taken with the order of narration, and a free choice of place and time for the action. The author's presence is felt throughout, and many romantic works are really protracted monologues. The feelings in romantic poetry are intensified and exaggerated, and on the whole romanticism concentrates on man's inner world, looking on life and history as the theatre in which people's passions and ideas are realised, determining by their fortutous play and flux, the flux of life.[7]

By now it would have become clear how much of modern Tamil literature answers these descriptions. There are two ways by which we can hope to see the dynamics of an artistic movement : the manner in which it affects the lives of the artistis and the extent to which it permeates their creativity. By Romantic life we generally mean a person's deep concern with ideas and things and a passion for realising his aspirations in action-by changing the world or the self. The passion and energy for action can be seen in the Artist's chosen means - studies, researches, involvements, sacrifices and political options. Partly resulting from this passion for involvement and action was the proverbial unhappiness of the Romantic, often due to unhappy love, invalidity, opiate addiction, poverty or persectuion. This suffering in turn induces self-pity and egocentric display. The crux of the matter is that the Romantics felt it impossible

to go on writing almost entirely in conventions that were already well accepted, and felt that new conventions were urgently needed and had to be created. These remarks, obvious as they may seem are meant to serve as a convenient frame work to what follows. For I wish to discuss a few writers beginning from Bharathi who may be described as generally representative of the Romantic movement. One word of explanation; I have referred to conventions used by our writers – both the neoclassicists and the Romantics - and may probably speak about the Realists. I should not give the impression that these are purely external matters, adopted and articulated by writers by simple choice. These conventions penetrate deeply a writer's personality, and what is more important they are intimately related to and arise from the cultural interests of the social group or class to which the writers concerned belong. This being so we must not lose sight of the social factors that have vital bearings on the matter.

Now, Bharathi very deliberately turning his back on what our neo-classicists of the late Nineteenth Century found "poetic", tried to create his own idiom, although it must be remembered that certain poets within the confines of the religious tradition-like Gopalakrishna Bharathy (c. 1785-1875) and Ramalinga Swami (1823-1874) were intuitively tending towards it.

Bharathi's verse, finding the prevailing form and metres inadequate to cope with his new creative impulses, breaks through the rigidity of convention and reaches out to the common man. In an article titled **Punarjanmam** 'Rebirth' in the sense of renaissance, he wrote as follows ;

> Books of ancient times were written in the language then in vogue. As times change, language too changes, old words became obsolete yielding place to new ones. Poets should adopt words that will be clearly understood by the people of their age

> Different epochs require different expressions. Good poetry is that which conveys exquisite inner visions in easy and elegant style. When poetry becomes obscure or ornate it ceases to be enjoyable and will repel the populace.

Elsewhere he said, certainly referring to the neo-classical verses, "sincereity disappeared giving place to mere verbal embellishments. But the great Kamban thought differently when he compared the bright, clear cool flow of the Godavari to great poetry". His most lucid proposition on the language of poetry was made in the Preface to **Panchalisabatham,** 'Vow of Panchali' (1910):

> He who produces an epic in simple style and diction, easily understandable metres and popular tunes will be infusing a new life into our language. The meaning must be crystal clear even to the neo-literates; at the same time, the poem must not be wanting in the graces and refinements that are expected of an epic.

This was a new poetic manifesto – the manifesto of Tamil poetry of the 20th Century. I don't need to point out that Bharathi was consciously appealing to a general reading public away from the exclusive elite that chiefly read poetry when he began to write. He was describing a style simple to follow and to understand. Needless to say Bharathi's proclamation is reminiscent of the "advertisement" prefixed by Wordsworth to the volume of **Lyrical Ballads** that he published with Coleridge in 1798. What was most provocative in Wordsworth's definition was his intent to choose modest and familiar themes, subjects drawn from "humble and rustic life", expressed in "the real language of men". I don't want to make too much of the resemblance between the theory of poetry of Wordsworth and Bharathi, but the similarity is striking and relevant. What is significant is the recognition that poetic modes reflect the

degree of the poet's self awarness and self–knowledge. Bharathi belongs to an overall reawakening of consciousness and self conscious modernization that took place in India. Poets in other Indian languages shared this trend, proclaiming a "new sensibility, a new meaning, a new abundance" in poetics.

"This intellectual awakening was bound, sooner or later, to percolate down into the world of action and politics", for, 'all the great movements of our century, in India as elsewhere in Asia, are all inclusive movements, grounded at first on a blind revolt against the forcible imposition of a western culture that is finally rejected, and then on a search for a new world outlook in which ethics, economics, social structures, politics and religion are all bound together"[8]. It is not surprising therefore, that Bharathi too had this all inclusive 'weltanschaung'. Patriotism in his poetry is metamorphosised into a new religion. The poem 'To Liberty' illustrates this. Politics pervaded his entire being. Even in his most subjective personal moments his imagination is firmly rooted in the mundane realities of the world around him - a world of nationalist aspirations, political persecution and subterfuge. Bharathi maintains fluid lines between his personal and public experiences. For instance, while writing of his adolescent love in 'Autobiography', a poem that shows him in one of his intense lyrical moments, he compares his avid anticipation of his loved one, with that of the British spies waiting in stealth for freedom fighters to pass. The intensity of his longing transcends mere adolescent nostalgia and transforms itself into a mature realistic experience. Likewise, in **Kannan Pattu**, 'The Song of Krishna', while dwelling on the image of Lord Krishna as the father, he cannot help but bring vignettes of contemporary political life - of baton charges and prison life. Bharathi's poetic imagination with its simultaneous response to the ethereal and the earthy takes politics in its stride. For he could sing fiery lyrics of resurgent nationalism in the same breath as he sings poems of mysticism. Now if we turn to the Western Romantics, especially the English Romanticists we see them as active agents in the spreading of political

doctrines. Crane Brinton in **The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists** makes the following statement :

> In the first place, romanticism as a way of thought is a part of that vast change in men and things, the Revolution, and as such has many links with the political changes of the Revolution. ...Almost to a man, the English romanticists were actively interested in politics. It is just here that the political opinions of men of letters become especially valuable.

Although Bharathi was, unique in this, among his Indian contemporaries, yet he can easily be assimilated into the world tradition of romantic poetry, Ernst Fischer says, "Romanticism meant rebellion pure and simple, a trumpet call to the people to rise against foreign and homebred oppressors, an appeal to national consciousness, a struggle against feudalism, absolutism and foreign rule". Thus Byron responded to the distant struggle for Greek independence. Shelley felt for the underdog in Ireland, Greece and other parts of the world. He had a passion for reforming the world, to purge the world of exploiters and oppressors.

> "Kings, priests and statesmen blast the human flower even in its tender bud; their influence darts like subtle poison through the bloodless veins of desolate society"

His **Queen Mab** was sweeping in its condemnation of kings nobles, priests and judges. Like Shelley, Bharathi too was imbued with the spirit of freedom and was equally ecstactic of people in other lands fighting against brute force and tyranny. Bharathi's poem 'New Russia' seems to have been considerably influenced by Shelley's **Ode to Liberty** and Byron's **Ode to Napolean Bonaparte.** The poetic recapturing of scenes of the past in **Isles of Greece** - Don Juan – is present in Bharathi's poem **Endaiyum Thayum.** When Bharathi says, "It was on this land, our mothers as maidens spent moonlit nights in dance and frolic' one finds distinct echoes of the following lines in **Isles of Greece**

The Isles of Greece, the isles of Greece
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace
Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung
Eternal summer glides them yet ...

Speaking of Byron, it may be worthwhile to note that of all the English romanticists he was the one to be held in high esteem in Europe and elsewhere. The German Goethe acclaimed without any reservations that Byron's **Don Juan** was a "work of boundless genius". And Mazzini, himself a man of vision and action said, "Byron gave a European role to English poetry. He led the genius of England on a pilgrimage through Europe". There is no doubt that Byron who was one of the great emanici-patory forces of Nineteenth Century Europe, was during the latter part of the Century and even at the beginning of the present Century giving its mood and colour to Indian literature. Perhaps he exerted the widest influence throughout India more than any English poet except Shakespeare. Arabinda Poddar's graphic account of Byron's influence on Bengali writers is applicable to other parts of India as well. In "Lord Byron and the Literary Renaissance in Bengal" he points out that besides H. L. D. Derozio (1809–1831), the poet leader of 'young Bengal' such outstanding poets and dramatists as Madhusudan Datta, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Nabin-chandra sen and D. L. Roy were deeply indebted to Byron.

Bharathi's aestheticism drew sustenance from the English Nature Poets, especially John Keats. In **Kuyil Pattu**, 'The song of Kuyil' (Cuckoo) there are definite traces of his acquaintance with Keats' 'Endymion' and 'Ode to a Nightingale' On this I would like to mention Dr. V. Satchithanandan's perceptive article "Keats, Shakespeare and Bharathi's **Kuyil Pattu**" published in **Essays on Bharathi** (1962).

Bharathi expounds the lines of Keats – "Beauty is truth, truth, beauty" in one of his essays. This is not to maintain that

Bharathi's appreciation of beauty was derived from external sources. During the dark period, Indian poets, owing to dire poverty, servitude and ignorance had almost forgotten the concept of beauty. In these circumstances the English romantic poets provided the impetus necessary for Bharathi to re-establish aestheticism in the mainstream of Tamil poetry. Thus in his passionate defence of freedom in all its forms emancipation of the oppressed, the women, and the underdog, Bharathi's thoughts were penetrated by the same philosophy of expansion and democracy that inspired many European Romanticists. For instance, Shelley, whom as we all know, Bharathi admired and in some ways emulated, expected a great deal from women; not the women of his environment and time, but the new woman like Cythna who was also in Shelley's view the natural woman. Once woman is liberated she would become the most precious of allies. Shelley held that emancipated woman will help reconstruct the glorious new world. It has been pointed out by some scholars that Bharathi's **Puthumai Penn** is an amalgam of Shelley's new woman and the concept of **Shakthi** in the Indian tradition. On the whole it is generally agreed by students of comparative studies that in the pervading lyricism and aestheticism of his poems Bharathi had much in common with the English Romantic poets. Of course it must be remembered that they were not the only ones who enlivened and enlarged his vision.

Besides his voluntarism and the impelling hunger for freedom, which were essentially in the realms of feeling and action, Bharathi also imbibed certain modes of literary expression from the Romantic poets, the most productive of them being the lyric. It is a common place of aesthetic criticism that lyricism was inseparably connected to European Romantic faith. Hegel in his Aesthetics accurately defined its essence :

> Lyricism is a kind of basic element of romantic art, the tone in which the epos and drama also speak, and which pervades, like some universal aroma of the soul, even works of the plastic arts.

Bharathi is essentially a lyrical poet. It is his lyrics that afford ample evidence of his greatness as a poet. Walter Pater considered lyric poetry to be "artistically the highest and most complete form of poetry" which is "precise because in it we are least able to detach the matter from the form, without a deduction of something from the matter itself" He felt that the very perfection of such poetry often appears to depend, in part, on a certain suppression or vagueness of mere subject, so that the meaning reaches us through ways not distinctly traceable by the understanding.[11] In his lyrics Bharathi achieved the immediate communication of a dominant emotion; "A stray word or gesture set his imagination afire, and out of the confrontation and explosion emerged a lyric perpetually alive in an orbit of its own". In one of his brilliant lyrical poems, 'Moonlight, stars and the wind' he speaks of poetic inspiration.

> Here he comes, the angel of the wind bringing to my ears the thousand and one sounds of men's life on earth. There is the voice of a bell swinging towards me, a dog barks, a beggar cries piteously for a handful of rice, somebody slams the street door, from the east floats the walling of a conch, men talk and argue and quarrel, a child weeps – ah, who can count the notes that the wind brings? I sit and weave them all joyously intc songs"

These are the concluding lines of a poem that begins with the poet urging his mind-bird to freely float in the sky, to reach out to the far star-cluster, and to speed across space in joyous frenzy. And then almost abruptly the poet listens to "the thousand and one sounds of men's life on earth". In a poem like this we see Bharathi making a voyage of the outer and of the inner world. The noteworthy fact about him is that his feet are firmly planted on the earth and his mind is often "voyaging through strange seas of thought alone". A perfect blend of the two voyages is to be found in his **Gnanaratham**, an allegorical work in prose that combines utopia and reality,

bringing into full play the poet's descriptive powers. Here we have the source and strength of his poetry: the unique counterpoint of tumult and peace, of sublimity and mundane, the ethereal flight of the abstracting mind and the physiological responses that constitute the basic substance of the poet's imagination and impulse.

So much for the most salient features of romantic strains in Bharathi's life and poetry. But these and some other features are to be found, naturally enough in the works of others too. Take for instance the lyric Although the lyric found its first and best response in Bharathi, a few before him had already begun to prepare the ground. V. G. Suriyanarayana Sastry had published two volumes of poems in 1901 and 1902. Reference has already been made to **Tani-pacura-togai.** In spite of the very favourable opinion expressed by G U. Pope who translated the forty-one 'short poems' into English, there was little sign of its influence upon the main stream of poetry in Tamil. The post-Bharathi generation has almost neglected it. The new poetic mood and taste found no place for Sastriar. It is true that he broke some new ground in introducing the sonnet - a form eminently suited for lyricism. In fact in his preface the author spoke with adoration of Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare as great English poets who had enriched the sonnet adapted from Italian. However as the English translator himself candidly admitted, "these short poems could hardly with propriety be called sonnets". Besides the prosodical and other 'technical' factors which, in the eyes of the translator vitiated the quality of the poems, there wasn't the intense depth of feeling and the free play of imagination leading to special insight or intuitive preception. The interplay of insight and imagination is the predominant feature of Romantic poetry. However Sastriar's second volume showed certain changes. There is in these poems the note of veritable experience. Although the metre and the diction were conventional there was something personal

that he was trying to express: The provenance of all the poems were actual experiences: death of his teachers, eminent personages, and close friends; walk on a beach; an evening near the lake; in memory of his mentor; and walk through the city. These had personal reference and meaning to him and did give some "indication of a new departure in Tamil poetry"; but he could never throw off the neo-classical influence upon him. His long rhymed lines were chaste and correct and at times quite expressive of certain moods, but compared to the short lyric measures of Bharathi one feels the absence of a higher musical quality. The value of his wo'k remains chiefly academic and historical.

It is appropriate at this point, to say something of the nature poetry that abounds in Tamil in the modern period and which undoubtedly owes its main inspiration to the English Romanticists. As I mentioned a moment ago we already notice in Sastriar's poety descriptive pieces that have no precedent for them. I need not dwell on the treatment and interpretation of nature in **Sangam** poetry. Scholars like T. P. Meenakshi-sundaram, Rev. X S. Thaninayagam and M. Varadarajan have dealt with it. Clearly, the emphasis of nature in **Sangam** poems is as the necessary and sympathetic background or 'situation' for the human act. Nature has no independent existence on its own merit for its own sake. As Father Thaninayagam has aptly said, "the scenery was changed to keep in harmony with the human sentiments that were dramatized".[12] There was no indulging in nature description nor extolling of nature-rapture. It was as though the luxuriant tropical nature had to be kept under careful control by the human beings. Nature finds an insignificant place and role in the manifestly didactic works of the post-**Sangam** period. It finds an incidental role in the devotional hymns of Sambandhar in whom 'divine' nature generated the poetic spark and brought about the instant incandescence. But generally speaking the **bhakthi** poets were animated by Puranic mythology rather than by natural scenery. The place of natural scenery in the epics is

purely functional and in late medieval literature nature virtually disappears. Therefore the appearance of nature poetry in twentieth century Tamil is almost entirely due to the Western impact. And in this the influence of the Romanticists was of cardinal importance.

At about the time when Suriyanarayana Sastriar published his 'short poems' — **Poets' Feast** (1902) — Subramania Bharathi began writing his first poems : **Thanimai irakkam** 'Sorrow in Loneliness', **Yan**, 'I' and **Chandrihai**, 'Moonlight'. These too, were sonnets. At first sight, these poems appear to be no different from those of Sastriar. Here is late Nineteenth Century elitist subject-matter, bookish and literary. The familiar features of scholastic style and form — archaisms of vocabulary and syntax, conventional epithets, stock allusions and metrical patterns — that were to be seen in current works. For instance, the poem **Chandrihai** begins with the word **'Yanar'** meaning freshness, goodness, fertility and new income. It is part of the **Sangam** diction. Young Bharathi himself must have given some thought about its usage. For in a footnote he has given a gloss; **Yanar** means beauty. The Wordsworthian inspiration is evident. And yet a second glance at these early specimens gives an inkling of Bharathi's poetic craft. We get the impression that a more subtle process than the mere reproduction, or worse imitation of certain models is involved in his art. As Periyasami Thooran observed, already we can see Bharathi's poetic fire sparkling in these poems. Considering the totality of his work it is quite clear that Bharathi did not engage himself in pure descriptive poetry. Both in his lyrics and in the longer poems like **Kuyil Pattu** and **Panchali Sabatham** are interspersed exquisite passages exhibiting great power. And in these passages, the mature poet absorbs and re-creates some imageries and descriptions of English nature poets. I shall limit myself to one single illustration. Towards the end of the first canto in **Panchali Sabatham** the Pandavas are on their way to Hastinapura at the invitation of Dryodana. During the journey

while resting, Arjuna takes Draupadi for an evening walk. Under the pretext of adhering to the epical requirement of describing the sun set, Bharathi allows Arjuna describe with the minuteness of a painter, "the modifications of effect as the sun goes down and the lights change." The passage showe Bharathi in one of his inspired moments. Not satisfied with his poetic portraiture he has added a prose description in the notes. While reading the glorious passage one is suddenly reminded of "An Evening walk". The corresponding passage in Wordsworth's poem runs as follows :

> How pleasant, as the sun declines, to view
> The spacious landscape change in form and hue!
> Here, vanish, as in mist, before a flood
> Of bright obscurity, hill, lawn, and wood ;
>
> There, objects, by the searching beams betrayed,
> Come forth, and here retire in purple shade;
> Even the white stems of birch, the cottage white,
> Soften their glare before the mellow light,
> The skiffs, at anchor where with umbrage wide,
> You chestnuts half the latticed boat-house hide,
> Shed from their sides, that face the sun's slant beam,
> Strong flakes of radiance on the tremulous stream :

To a careful observer Bharathi's evocatory passage will be oddly reminiscent but not all an echo of Wordsworth's poem. After Bharathi, nature poems have become regular subjects. Indeed hardly any volume of poetry comes out without containing a section 'on nature'. Such is the instance on landscape as a subject - an important subject - for our poets that one has to remind oneself that the idea should be traced back to nature poets. It is to be observed in this connection that to the English almost all the major lyrical poets after Bharathi - Bharathidasan, Desikavinayakampillai, S. D. S. Yogi, Kambadasan, Nanal, Somu, Pattukottai, Kalaivannan, Vanidasan Thirulokasitaram, 'Mahakavi' (T. Rudramurti), Murugaiyan and Nuhuman -

the last three from Sri Lanka, - have to their credit admirable nature poems. Bharathidasan's **Alagin Ciripu** is indeed a **tour de force**, exhibiting the poet at his best. Avoiding pure description, which can at best be an aesthetic exercise, he has successfully accomplished the task of once again making nature become the "theatrical property" in the way the **Sangam** poets did. In passing it may be noted that the English nature poets had an original advantage which our moderns lack. Wordsworth and his contemporaries had a tradition of nature poetry before them and what is more crucial, were able to draw from the landscape painting of thoir day. The parallel that comes to my mind in the Tamil literary tradition, is one of a later time and belonging to different context the poetry of the **Bhakthi** poets whose descriptions of feminine figures were matched by the temple sculptures of their time.

Besides the Romantic poems on nature there were also other influences at work. Swami Vedachalam (1876-1950) who later renamed himself as Maraimalaiyadigal, translated six essays of Joseph Addison (1672-1719) the leading English essayist of the early 18th Century. Addison, as is well known, propounded a theory of artistic imitation. Through his tangled and tortuous arguments he presented a theory on the relationship between art and nature. He was apparently inspired by the sensationalist philosophy of John Locke. The calm and moderate Addison was no romanticist, but his analogy between a poem and a picture had considerable attraction for bellestristie scholars. Vedachalam's translations of Addison's essays appeared between 1904–1905 in his journal **Gnanasagaram.** They were published in book form in 1908 under the title **Cintanaikkadduraikal**[13]. Later when Maraimalaiyadigal came to write **Kumutavalli** (1911)- an adaptation of a mediocre story from English - he included many lengthy descriptions in it.

In the twenties and thirties there arose a movement in India calling upon people to return to nature. The slogan 'Back to Nature' had its genesis in Gandhian anti-industrialism and

Tagorean natural life. It also had echoes of Rousseau and Tolstoy. Rousseau preached the idea of the true relationship between men and nature. Although Rousseau has been assailed by his critics for idealizing the "natural man" or "noble savage', his essential teaching was against the artificialities of civilization. Something of Rousseauism entered the Tamil poetic consciousness through the English nature poets. The concept of 'Back to Nature' evoked sympathetic chords in many Tamil minds already attuned to the Romantic quest for transcendental unity. While the response was greater in poetry, prose writers too were not completely free from its influence. For example K. S. Venkataramani's **Murugan the Tiller** (1927), idealises villagers and the village life, clearly projecting the message of back to the villages. Few others followed suit. T. L. Nadesan who wrote under the pseudonym of Sangararam, published two books in English : **The Children of the Kaveri** (1926) **The Love** of Dust (1938). The latter was translated by the author himself as **Mannasai** (1941) - perhaps the first Tamil novel dealing with village life. Certainly it was a landmark in the history of Tamil fiction. R. Shanmugasundaram's **Nagammal** (1941) is another novel that belongs to this category. In the process of writing a novel on village life, Shanmugasundaram created the vogue for the regional novel. Kongunadu became a symbolic locality in his novels. It must be said, however, that there is nothing nostalgic in his treatment of village life. In **Nagammal**, for instance, strained relations in a family unit create innumerable problems, especially for the heroine, where only the mental toughness of the characters and a steely adherence to rational self-interest guarantee survival. Shanmugasundaram's novel owes something to Hardy's novels like **Return of the Native** and **Tess of the D'Urbervilles** in the balanced treatment of the relationship between man and nature. The nature novels lost their vitality by the late fifties.

Intimately related to the interest in Nature, and the notion of the nobility of village life is the Romanticists' enthusiasm for popular cultures. The Germans took a lead in this matter and

evolved the concept of the **Volk**. Out of this grew the passion for folk-lore and folk studies which have become the basic ingredients of cultural nationalism It is not wrong to assume that the revival of folk studies and its growing importance in our literature is largely due to the romantic impulse.

I said earlier that there were also other influences at work. Besides the Romanticists, Shakespeare has always been with us. A glance at **Shakespeare in Tamil Translation** (1974) – a Critical **Bibliography** published by your university will demonstrate the abiding interest of the Tamils in that great poet. The earliest translation of one of his plays appeared in 1874. But it must be recognised that interest in Shakespeare has been largely confined to either academic or highly amateurish cricles. It never kindled the creative sparks. Likewise there were other major and minor western writers whose influences are conspicuous on individuals. Whitman has certainly been a powerful force. In the case of Whitman there has been a two way traffic. Even a little known Belgian poet like Emile Verhaeren (1855–1916) seems to have inspired Bharathi. But on the whole the most significant influence on 20th Century Tamil poetry has been the Romantic Movement. One sure way to ascertain this would be to look at the scanty but available translations. Of the major poets probably Desigavinayagam pillai did the most number of translations: Blake, Emerson, Tennyson, Fitzgerald, Swinburne and Edwin Arnold were rendered into Tamil. In some other poems his indebtedness to Wordsworth and Burns is patent. If one were to take at random two Volumes of translations, the range of poets translated will become clear. **Cintanai Katirkal** (1945) contains translations from English poets. The choice and selection of poets reveals the translator's predilection: Shakespeare, Charles Kingley, E. W. Wilcok, James Montgomery, Thomas Randolph, Prancis Bacon, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, Wordsworth, Carlyle, James Shirley, Byron, Samuel Johnson, John Dyer, Thomas Cooper, Walter Raleigh, Southwell, Robert Burns, Longfellow, George Crabbe, Anna

Barbauld, Beaumont and a few anonymous poets. It will be evident that most of the poets and poems chosen have a moral purpose. The next slender volume is **Oru Varam** (1964) translations by the Sri Lankan poet, R. Murugaiyan. Here again the choice indicates the personality of the translator; Michael Drayton, Shakespeare, John Donne, Robert Herrick, John Suckling, William Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, John Lehman and Ezra Pound.

It now remains to say a few words on the intellectual atmosphere of the Romantic poets and the interplay of literature and science in Europe.[14] The Tamil literati in general, the very idea of the interplay of science and literature might sound incongruous if not absurd. Owing to various factors arising out of our history and in particular our social organization and values, there has occurred, over the last few centuries, a bifurcation that has taken the two on different trajectories. But when we remember that the whole of the development of what is called modern literature in the west has taken place during the last two hundred years or so, it cannot escape our recognition that this development has also taken place under the shadow of the multifarious fructification of science. Consequently, it is logical to expect that a mutual fertilization would have enriched both. This is not the place to trace in detail the various scientific theories and hypotheses that stood behind some of the literary concepts and statements of the great poets and novelists. Although their approach was different their interest in science was deep-rooted and enduring. For instance, Whitehead has pointed out how Shelley's knowledge of astronomy, meteorology and physics coloured the imagery of some of his more mature poems. As F. A. Lea has remarked in **Shelley and the Romantic Revolution** (1945), "the stained carpets and tea-cups full of chemicals in Shelley's rooms at University College symbolize one of its characteristic developments."

Coleridge too, it will be recalled was very widely read in not only philosophical literature but also in scientific treatises. Those familiar with John Livingston Lowes' **The Road to Xanadu** which is a microscopic analysis of the genesis of Coleridge's masterpiece, will know something of the "strange alchemical process of its creation".

The German Romanticists were even more absorbed in scientific lore. Schlegel, Von Kleist, Goethe and Novali were up-to-date with the scientific discoveries of their time. Those who imagine the Romanticists, in particular the Germans, to have been preoccupied with the occult and macabre should remember this close link between science and literature that has existed during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries As much as the men of letters were attracted and hypnotized by the dazzling developments of science, men of science too have had a fascination for the poet's way of knowledge. Eminent scientists like Erasmus, Darwin, Sir Humphy Davy, Dalton, Oken, Faraday and Henry Vaughan and many others were equally at home in the world of poetry. In fact in recent years some English thinkers have opined that the gap that separates the two may be unhealthy and potentially dangerous. I do not mean the provocative words of Sir C P. Snow alone; others have expressed similar ideas and sentiments in slightly different ways.

School textbooks and popular writings have exaggerated the opposition between the two and portrayed the European romantic writers as purely speculative and subjective. Subjective they were, but not without inhaling and absorbing the scientific spirit that was all around them. At the higher realms the minds met and cherished one another. Biographers of Wordsworth have not failed to draw our attention to the sublime admiration in which he held Newton. It has been said that among the inspirations of Wordsworth's life at Cambridge none was more enduring and ever-fresh than the memory of the statue of Newton - the embodiment of pure intelligence :

> I could behold
> ... Newton with his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone ......

The general attitude of the poets of the 19th Century towards science was perhaps best articulated by Wordsworth himself. To do justice to the man and the subject I have to quote a lengthy passage :

> If the labours of the men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time shall ever come when these things shall be familar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective science shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.

I do not want to labour the point. Although Romantic literature of the West, along with other literatures of the preceding and subsequent periods have profoundly influenced modern Tamil literature, there has been a distillation and rarefaction on the part of the recipients. There has even been a strong tendency to mystify the essentially rational and philosophic western works. It is true that a poet like Blake may be an

exception to the rule. But even he was not immune to scientific ideas. It need hardly be emphasized that such rarefaction has resulted in stupefying the minds of our writers who have often taken the shadow for the real. But I think I have spoken enough of this unproductive approach. It is only in recent years that poetic apertures have been opened to view science and its implications in their proper perspective. In this, two names come to my mind immediately: Kulottungan (Dr. V.C. Kulandaiswamy) and Murugaiyan. Both these poets have made our poetry intellectually more serious than many usually think it is. There are a few younger writers who are struggling to resolve the apparent conflict between naturalistic and imaginative views of the world. This is very vital for us, for if English Romantic poetry was successful and momentous it was because it was able to synthesize points of view, which to many of us remain irreconcilable. A clear understanding of this problem will help our writers to decide not only the type of literary culture but also the world which they would want to build. The analysis of the relation between Tamil and Western literatures brought to my mind forcefully an astute observation of that pioneer sociologist Adam Ferguson (1723-1816). "Nations borrow only what they are nearly in a condition to have invented themselves". A comparative study of Tamil and English literatures seems to confirm the veracity of this statement. Thank you.

Notes

1. **The Necessity of Art** (Pelican Books) London, 1963. p. 53.

2. Jacques Barzun, **Classic Romantic and Mcdern,** New York, 1961, p. 98.

3. Ibid., p. 99.

4. Amaury De Riencourt, **The Soul of India,** London, 1961. p. 290.

5. Buddhadeva Bose, **An Acre of Green Grass,** Calcutta, 1948. p. 60—61.

6. The pathetic state of traditional Tamil scholarship during the 18th and 19th Centuries is vividly described in an article in the **Siddhanta Deepika** (Nov. 1897). "Within our own times we know of a whole class of Pandits who neither knew nor heard of any of these Idyls except the first **Tirumurugarruppadai,** which, as part of the XI Book of Saiva lore, has even been popular, though not well learnt and understood by all. When **Maturaikkanchi** was first introduced as a text for the B.A. Examination of 1894, we know how even Pandits of first grade Colleges were grumbling and murmuring against it. We know also of some cases in which some Pandits, who owned stray copies (Mss.) of some of these Idyls, gave up in despair all hopes of deciphering what the nature of their contents were. Even in print now, these are only bitter cups in the hands of some of the otherwise able scholars".

7. **A History of Realism,** Moscow, 1973. pp. 75—76.

8. Riencourt, op.cit. pp. 296—298.

9. **Indian Literature** (Proceeding of a Seminar) ed. Arabinda Poddar, Simla, 1972. pp. 116–124.

10. Quoted by Suchkov, op. cit. p. 76.

11. Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione" in **The Renaissance** (Modern Library edition) pp. 110-111.

12. Xavier S. Thani Nayagam, **Landscape and Poetry,** (2nd edn.) Bombay, 1966. p. 139.

13. Maraimaliyadigal wrote a lengthy Preface in English to the second edition of the book. Although the greater part of the Preface is taken up with the author's favourite theme of the "Aryan-Tamil" controversy, he also writes his appreciation of Addison. The following is typical of his praise. "In English literature, leaving aside the immense good rendered by the immortal works of such master poets as Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley and others, when we come to take into account the numerous benefits that accrued first to the English people and next through them to humanity at large, from the prose writings of literary men no name stands higher in our estimation than that of Joseph Addison." The Preface Is interesting for several reasons, of which the most important is the manifestation of his elitist attitude.

14. On this I am indebted to Ernest De Seli court whose chapter "The Interplay of Literature and Science during the Last three centuries" in Wordsworthian And Other Studies (Oxford, 1947) is illuminating. I have also leaned heavily on Graham Hough, **The Romantic Poet** (London 1953) and F. A. Lea, **Shelley** (London 1945).